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OR,

The Buccaneers of Barnegat Bay.

A Romance of the Early Days of the
Present Century.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE MAGIC SHIP," "SCARLET
SCHOONER," "MERLE, THE MUTINEER,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SMUGGLER'S SWEETHEART.

DAY dying, and night coming on dark and
stormy, threatening wreck and death along the
Jersey coast.

A few rays of golden splendor, cast from
between the piled-up masses of sable cloud-
mountains in the west, falling upon a pic-
turesque coast scene, where, upon the summit
of a cedar-clad hill, stands a young girl gazing
out upon the sea, where glides slowly along, and
close inshore, a trim-looking vessel-of-war fly-
ing the American flag, and with her rakish
masts stripped to meet the blow that soon must
strike her.

At the maiden's feet is a lowly mound, and
one hand rests upon a white head-board in the

BY COL PRENTISS INGRAHAM

"BACK! AND SPARE THIS MAN, FOR IF YOU ATTACK HIM, OR YOUR MEN FIRE UPON
HIM, I SWEAR TO SHOOT YOU DOWN!"

shape of a cross, while the other holds a small spy-glass.

Upon the humble head-board above the grave is carved with artistic skill the sad legend that tells the fate of the one who rests beneath:

"One night of fearful storm a gallant craft was dashed upon the coast, within sight of this grave, wherein lies a mother, whose dead body was cast ashore, still with lifeless arms encircling her living baby girl.

"To her memory stands this humble cross."

The girl who stood by this simple tomb was scarcely more than fifteen years of age, yet her form was graceful and budding into beautiful womanhood, while her face possessed rare attraction in the refinement and beauty that rested thereon, though she was burned brown by the sun and wind to which her life on these shores exposed her.

Her eyes were black, large and full of expression, while her hair, braided and hanging down her back far below her waist, was of that rich red-bronze hue that caused it to look like threads of gold when the sunset rays glanced upon it.

She was humbly though neatly deessed, her shoes were coarse in make, yet small, and setting jauntily upon her head was a sailor's hat, which gave her a saucy, rakish air that was very attractive.

Before her was the broad Atlantic, with the one sail visible upon its bosom, and behind her was a picturesque view of hill, plain and river scenery.

To the right were the inland waters of Manasquan river, with Barnegat Bay several leagues distant.

At the base of the hill upon which she stood were a score of fishermen's huts, hiding away in a grove of trees, as if to escape the chill, easterly winds that swept the coast in winter, and groups of men in sailor garb were visible here and there gazing out upon the vessel-of-war, and evidently discussing its presence so near off-shore.

"Ah! how deep was that roar of thunder! and see! the storm is sweeping round and will break from seaward.

"Sail, good vessel, sail away, for this is a bad coast to be caught on with the wind off the sea," said the young girl, speaking as one who knew well the treachery of the elements and the dangers of the coast.

"Oh! how rapidly the storm sweeps around, and still that vessel glides along as though fearing no danger— Ah!" and she covered her face with her hands as a vivid flash of lightning cut through the dark masses of rapidly rising clouds, and momentarily blinded her.

Again she looked, and clapping her hands together, she cried:

"They heed that warning, and are standing off to sea.

"I hope it will not be too late, for how the smugglers would gloat over yonder proud little craft if it was driven upon the shore and wrecked."

"And you would feel sorrow in that little heart of yours, Stella?"

"Oh, Hugh! how you startled me!" and she turned toward the one who had glided from among the trees to her side, and stood gazing upon her with a look full of love.

It was a young man of twenty one or two, with a form as straight as an arrow, broad shoulders, and a face that was handsome, and wore the stamp of a bold, daring spirit.

He wore white duck pants, about the waist of which was a sash of red silk, a blue jacket, a gray shirt with a broad, open collar, turned over a cravat tied with the sailor knot, and a tarpaulin, all going to make up a costume that would have given him the credit of being a sea-dandy, were it not for the resolution and character in his face.

"I have been watching two very pretty creatures for some little time, Stella," he said, softly.

"Indeed! and what were they?"

"Yonder saucy craft, which seems really like a thing of life, is one, and—"

"And the other, Hugh?" she asked, innocently, as he paused.

"And the other, Stella, was yourself."

She blushed at his words, and said, quickly:

"I fear, Hugh, that yonder beautiful vessel is in danger, for see how rapidly the storm sweeps round and down upon her."

"Yes, and this beautiful little clipper is in danger of getting a ducking, if she does not hasten home," he said, with a smile, not even glancing toward the schooner in her peril.

"I care nothing for a ducking, Hugh, and I cannot leave here while that vessel is in danger, for see! it is growing dark, and hear how angrily the thunder roars— Oh, Heaven, have mercy!"

"Great God! this is terrible!"

The thrilling cries that broke from the lips of both the young man and maiden were wrung from them by seeing earth and sea suddenly lighted up as though on fire with the livid flames that burst from the clouds, and one huge serpent of lurid light leaped down upon the schooner-of-war and coiled itself in fiery splendor about the tapering masts, while the hill

fairly rocked beneath the crashing thunder that followed the lightning's deadly stroke.

In breathless suspense the young sailor and the girl gazed upon what followed.

They heard, even at that distance, between the thunder crashes, the loud orders of the officers, and the sharp strokes of the axes came to their ears as the seamen cut away at the masts.

Then followed the crashing of timbers as a roll of the vessel sent her blazing rigging into the sea, and momentary darkness prevailed.

"Hugh, she will be wrecked!" said the maiden, in a hushed voice.

"Yes; when the storm sweeping down strikes her hull, she will be dashed upon the bar and go to pieces," was the calm response.

"And her crew will be lost, Hugh?"

"Yes, Stella."

"No! no! they must not die while help is at hand to save them.

"They must be saved, Hugh!" cried the girl, earnestly, turning upon the young sailor and placing her hands upon her shoulders.

"But how, Stella?"

"Your life-boat will live in any sea, will it not?"

"Yes."

"Then you must go out to yonder wreck and bring off her crew."

"But, Stella, they are our foes."

"What care I for that, Hugh Talbot?"

"Even now they are off this coast to hunt us down, and were we taken, long years in prison, if not worse, would be our doom."

"I care not what they may have been; now they are like dying men and demand our aid, and he who can give succor to them, and does not, is a coward!"

"Stella!"

The lightning revealed the face of the girl, white, angry, and the eyes flashing fire.

"I mean it, Hugh; he who can save those men, and stretches forth no hand to do so, is a coward!"

"Will you let me throw those words in your teeth, Hugh Talbot, and yet not give me the lie by your actions?" and she pointed toward the dismayed vessel drifting rapidly to its doom.

"Stella, for God's sake calm yourself, for what can I do unaided to save them?" cried the young sailor, in a voice full of earnestness.

"You can man the life-boat and go to their aid."

"Not alone."

"I do not ask you to go alone, sir; but to take your crew with you," was the indignant response.

"My crew will refuse to aid their foes."

"Order them to obey you, and shoot down the first man who refuses!" was the ringing rejoinder.

"Stella, are you mad, to talk thus?"

"Yes, I am desperate to see you stand idly here and not go to the succor of those poor fellow-seamen."

"Out upon such manhood, Hugh Talbot, and never call me sweetheart again, I command you!"

"Stella!" and the word was spoken in a low tone, while, as he continued his voice trembled with suppressed emotion:

"Stella, I am no coward, as you have seen proven, and my heart bleeds for those poor mariners, and gladly would I have gone to their rescue without word from you, did I hope to have aid from my men."

"But now, since you have told me never again to call you sweetheart, I will force you to take back your words, for, come what may, I will go out to yonder vessel, if I have to go in your little surf-skiff alone."

With the last word he bounded away down the hillside, leaving her standing by the grave, leaning heavily upon the wooden cross, for there came over her a feeling as though she would faint, while she cried piteously:

"Oh! what have I done by my cruel words to poor Hugh?"

"I have sent him to his death in trying to save others!"

"No, no; he shall not go alone, for, if his cowardly crew refuses to accompany him, I will!"

Nerving herself by an effort of will she too ran down the hillside toward the shore, which was now enshrouded in darkness, excepting when the livid lightning would burst from the clouds and seem momentarily to set earth and sea on fire.

CHAPTER II.

DARED BY A WOMAN.

UPON reaching the river-shore, under the shelter of the hill that arose above the fishing-hamlet, Stella found a scene of excitement going on, the cause of which she was at no loss to understand.

The young sailor, Hugh Talbot, had arrived some moments before her, and placing his boatswain's whistle to his lips had given a long, shrill call, while he went on toward the shore where the life-boat lay.

His crew of eight men promptly responded to the call, and joined him, accompanied by nearly every male inmate of the hamlet, who won-

dered at the strange summons from the young captain, for he held that rank among his followers.

"What in natur' is up, Cap'n Hugh, that you blow for a crew in this gale?" cried an old fisherman whose head was frosted with the three-score-and-ten years that had passed over it.

"There is a schooner in the offing in distress, Commodore, and I am going out to her aid.

"Come, lads, get the life-boat into the water!" was the answer of the young man.

"In distress?" said the old man, who, having served his time as a captain, had been dubbed "Commodore" by his younger messmates.

"Yes, she was struck by lightning, and they cut away her masts, and then dropped anchor; but the anchors drag in this blow, and she is dashing upon the bar."

"Come, lads! launch that boat!" and the order was given in a stern voice that showed Hugh Talbot to be in earnest, for his crew had made no movement to obey his former command.

"Do you know what craft that is, Hugh Talbot?" asked the "Commodore."

"Yes, it is the schooner-of-war, Crocodile."

"And you intend to go to her aid?"

"Certainly, for when a man needs my aid he is no longer my enemy," was the bold reply.

"They are our foes, Cap'n Hugh, and I will not go to aid them," said a young sailor, the coxswain of the boat, and his words were received with a murmur of applause.

"Then, Carter Hayes, you no longer form one of my crew."

"Come, lads, did you hear my orders to get that boat into the water?" and Hugh Talbot's voice rung with anger.

"It would be a terrible risk to go out in this storm, cap'n," said one.

"You have risked death many times before, so do so now."

The men stood in silence, but shook their heads, and Hugh Talbot's voice rung out:

"Ho! have my crew turned cowards, that they refuse to follow my lead?"

"We are no cowards, Hugh Talbot, but we will not save those from death who track us down by day and night," said the young coxswain.

"Silence, Carter Hayes, for you are no longer one of my crew; and to those that are I say if we are tracked by yonder vessel we break the laws of the land which we live in, and they but do their duty in dogging our steps."

"Ha! this smacks of treachery," cried Carter Hayes, in a loud voice.

But ere the words had hardly left his lips he was felled to the beach by a stinging blow in the face from the fist of Hugh Talbot, who cried:

"Take that for daring to hint that I could be guilty of treachery."

With a yell of rage the young coxswain arose to his feet, drew his sheath knife, and rushed upon Hugh Talbot, while a cry of horror arose among the group of men.

"Back! Carter Hayes, by the laws of our band, I command you to drop that knife!"

But the stern order of the young captain was unheeded, and the maddened sailor rushed upon him with the hoarsely-uttered words:

"I will have your life for that blow, Hugh Talbot!"

Then a red flash glared forth, mingling with the livid lightning, a sharp report rung out with the thunder-peals, and Carter Hayes fell his length upon the beach.

A silence like death followed the shot and its result, and then came in trumpet tones:

"Now, lads, will you obey me and launch that life-boat?"

Not a man moved, and one said, earnestly:

"Ask anything of us, Hugh, except to save our foes."

"Then I go alone," was the reply of Hugh Talbot, and he bounded toward a small surf-skiff lying near.

"No, Hugh Talbot, I go with you, as your crew fear to risk their precious lives."

In scornful tones the words came from Stella, and, not before noting her presence in their midst, the group of men were fairly startled when her voice broke in upon the excitement of the scene.

"No, no, Stella, you must not go," cried a young fisherman, springing forward, and his words met with general approval, for a score of men cried out against the rash act she contemplated.

"Hugh Talbot shall not go alone, and as you fear to go with him, I shall go," she answered.

"We do not fear to go, Stella, for our lives are at stake all the time; but we refuse to aid our enemies, those who, if saved to-night, will hunt us down to-morrow with a rope in their hands to put about our necks."

"Nonsense! this is a fishing hamlet, and those men cannot prove to the contrary, whatever they may suspect us to be."

"See! Hugh is ready, and I go with him."

"No! no! we will go in the life-boat."

The words broke forth in a chorus from the life-boat crew, and strong arms at once seized

it and ran it into the water, while Stella called out:

"Come, Hugh, for your boat and crew await you!"

The young sailor was just about to spring into the light surf-skiff, when he heard the call, and seeing that the maiden had dared the men to make the venture, he ran forward and sprung into the life-boat, saying sternly, as he took the tiller:

"Give way with a will, lads!"

Urged by eight strong oarsmen, the buoyant boat shot away down the river toward the sea, followed by a cheer and good wishes from those they left on shore.

Seeing the boat off, Stella then turned to the prostrate form of Carter Hayes, which still lay where it had fallen, and suddenly she cried:

"Thank God he is not dead! Quick! bear him to his home, and one of you ride in all haste for the doctor!"

Her words created intense excitement, for Carter Hayes had been believed dead, and the life-boat flying down the river was momentarily forgotten, while the crowd gathered about the wounded man.

Then, unheeded by them, Stella glided away, and a moment after the cry arose, as a vivid flash of lightning illumined the scene:

"See the surf-skiff?"

"It is Stella in it!" came an answering cry, and voice after voice called her back.

But borne on the gale to their ears came the response:

"I will not return, for I follow that life-boat to aid our foes!"

CHAPTER III.

WRECKED.

THERE was no trimmer craft in the United States navy at the time of which I write, which was early in the present century, than was the schooner-of-war Crocodile.

A model of beauty, thoroughly armed and manned, she was officered by Captain Frank Ferncliffe, a New Yorker of wealth, and the last male member of a family that looked proudly back upon its ancestors for generations.

Captain Ferncliffe was a good sailor, a strict disciplinarian, and a stern man who was never happy away from the deck of his pretty vessel.

He had served with distinction in foreign seas, and had been placed in command of the Crocodile several months prior to the opening of this story for the express duty of hunting down the smugglers that at that time infested the shores of Long Island and New Jersey, and frequently extended their smuggling to the very verge of piracy.

One particular outlaw craft known as the Sea Ghost had committed innumerable acts of lawlessness, and always had most skillfully eluded all attempts to capture her.

She was said at times to have her haunts upon the Jersey coast, in the vicinity of Barnegat Bay, and at others to fly for safety to the inlets that indent the shores of Long Island; but her retreat could never be discovered by the cruisers sent after her, and each chase had always ended in her disappearing in a manner so mysterious that her name of "Ghost of the Sea" was certainly most appropriate.

One of her peculiarities was that she had never been seen at night, and when seen was described as a "small, rakish schooner, sharp as a razor, lying low in the water, and carrying sail enough for a vessel double her tonnage, while her hull, masts and spars were painted white."

It was in search of this mysterious craft that the Crocodile schooner-of-war had sailed down the Jersey coast, and was cruising slowly along off the mouth of the Manasquan river, upon the afternoon when this romance opens its scenes and incidents to the view of the reader.

Captain Ferncliffe had heard that the Ghost of the Sea, or Sea Ghost, as the craft was more familiarly called, had run a large cargo of smuggled goods right up the harbor of New York a few nights before, and, in avoiding capture by a revenue barge, had boldly run it down, causing the death of several officers of the law.

A merchant craft standing into the harbor and spoken by the Crocodile had reported the Sea Ghost as putting in toward Barnegat Bay just before dawn, and thither Captain Ferncliffe had headed.

With no coast pilot on board, he had fired guns to bring off one from the fishing hamlets he could see inshore; but not a single boat had put off in response, and he dared not send a boat on shore as he saw the storm sweeping up.

As the gale threatened to strike from off-shore, the crew of the Crocodile felt no dread, thinking to ride out the tempest under the lee of the land.

But the sudden sweeping around of the storm to seaward had caused them anxiety, as it would find them on a lee-shore, and the captain determined to beat off to get good sea-room, when the heavens discharged their fiery darts and the brave little craft was doomed.

As soon as the masts, with the rigging one

mass of flames, had gone overboard into the sea, the order was given to let go the anchors, and the bow of the wreck was brought around with a force that made every timber groan and creak, while the wall of foam, driven before the storm, swept the decks with merciless fury, carrying several unfortunate men off to a sailor's tomb in the depths of the ocean.

For a few moments it was hoped that the wreck would be able to ride out the storm; but the tempest increased so in fury that, after a mighty lunge, one cable parted and the star-board anchor alone remained firm, and it was at once discovered that it was dragging at a fearful rate.

"Cut away that stern pivot and fire signals of distress, Lieutenant Mabrey!"

"Some fishermen may be induced to come to our aid, from a hope of reward if not for humanity's sake," said Captain Ferncliffe, addressing a handsome young officer, who at once gave the necessary orders.

A few moments of suspense, and then the gun's deep-voiced cry for help went forth over the storm-swept waters and reached the ears of those for whom its appeal was intended.

But already was the life-boat forging ahead through the teeth of the storm, and at her tiller was Hugh Talbot, silent and stern, while, a cable's length astern, in the wake of the larger craft, the surf-skiff was fighting the wild waters, with Stella, the Daughter of Neptune, as the fishermen called her, guiding its destinies.

Three times the brazen throat of the pivot-gun sent forth its cry for help, and then came a loud report, and the end of the cable flew back upon the deck, and the anchor no longer held the doomed craft's head to the tempest.

"Cease firing, and stand ready to meet the worst!"

In trumpet tones the command of Captain Ferncliffe rung over the wreck, and the men huddled together to await the inevitable, for the boats had been torn away, their vessel was a wreck, and death stared them in the face, as they knew that they must soon strike the outer bar and the hull go to pieces, for no work that man had made could withstand the fury of the sea.

Clinging to the bulwarks in a huddled mass, officers and men awaited their fate, silent and undaunted to the last.

CHAPTER IV.

LIFE-BOAT AHOY!

WITH a shock that was terrible to the crew clinging to her bulwarks, the Crocodile went beam on upon the bar, and keeled over under the fierce fury of the waves.

A few of her crew lost their hold, and were torn off to die amid the wild waters; but others, hoping amid almost despair, managed to cling firmly, and thus passed the first few moments after the shock of striking the bar, while the stout hull, strained to its utmost, pounded heavily upon the sand belt that held it there, far off from the shore.

"Boat ho!"

The cry came from the lips of Burr Mabrey, the senior luff, for, in a temporary lull of the driving waves, when there came a vivid flash of flame from the inky clouds overhead, his keen eyes had caught sight of a boat off upon the waters, pulling into the very teeth of the gale, and bounding about from crest to crest, like a duck with broken wing striving to fly above the chaotic waste beneath it.

A cheer from the half a hundred men clinging to the wreck greeted the cry, and every eye was strained landward, every heart seemed to cease its beating, as all waited for the coming of the next electric glare that would light up the sea.

A moment, which seemed an age, and once more earth and sea seemed on fire with the arrows of vivid light that shot through the skies.

Then half a hundred throats sent forth a hoarse cry of joy, for not two cables' length away, and heading straight for the wreck was visible a large life-boat, urged by brave men with iron arms, to force it against that living gale.

Savagely the wreck pounded upon the bar, louder and louder groaned the timbers, with a cracking, crashing sound now and then that showed the hull was breaking up slowly, and all knew that it could not stand the fury of the waters much longer.

Would the boat hold them all?

Such was the thought in every brain.

Another flash, and the question was answered in the negative, for though a large life-boat, it could not possibly hold more than a score besides her crew.

"Lieutenant Mabrey!" called out Captain Ferncliffe.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the prompt answer shouted back.

"You go in the boat with what men it will hold, and then send it back for the rest, if not too late."

Then, raising his voice, Captain Ferncliffe shouted:

"Ho, men! I want volunteers to remain on

the wreck with me until the boat returns for us!"

A dead silence followed the words of the gallant officer, for with hope of life at hand, why should one yield to another, was the thought in the minds of the crew.

All knew that life was before those who went in the boat, and that death was left for those who remained on the wreck.

After a dead silence the captain called out:

"Ho, lads, I wish half the crew to volunteer to remain with me."

"Who answers?"

"I, for one, sir!" cried Lieutenant Burr Mabrey.

"And I, for another!" came in the shrill voice of a midgy.

"And I!"

"And I!" and the volunteers came from the officers, and then slowly went the response among the men until a dozen had spoken, and silence followed.

"More must volunteer, lads, for yonder boat will not hold more than half of us at furthest," cried the captain.

Still no answer came, and then in the dread silence came the ringing hail:

"Wreck ahoy!"

"The life-boat, ahoy!" shouted back Ferncliffe.

"I will come as close under your lee as I dare."

"Stand by to throw me a line," came in seaman-like tones from the life-boat.

"Ay, ay, my brave fellows; but how many can you carry?" shouted back the captain.

"Thirty, sir, but no more."

The next instant the life-boat came close under the lee of the wreck, and, though tossed about like a feather in a mill-race, the line thrown by Burr Mabrey was skillfully caught by a man in her bow and made fast.

"Go, Mabrey, and take every one of these brave fellows with you who volunteered."

"The remainder shall wait," sternly ordered Captain Ferncliffe, and loud murmurs greeted his words.

"Come, men!" ordered the young officer, and one by one the men were conveyed to the boat by life-lines, until half a score of seamen had passed in safety, when there broke forth a rebellious spirit among those who expected they would be left to risk a second trip, and one, acting as ringleader, shouted out:

"Ho, lads, every man for himself now, and let those perish who cannot reach the boat!"

With others, he seized the line, and rapidly the life-boat was dragged toward the wreck.

In vain did Captain Ferncliffe and his officers command them to desist, and tell them that they would swamp the boat, for they were deaf to orders and entreaties.

But suddenly a tall form leaped to the bow of the life-boat, and above the howling tempest arose his voice:

"Hands off that line, you coward dogs!"

Momentarily they paused, but a cry from the ringleader and again they dragged heavily upon the line.

Instantly there came two flashes and sharp reports, and the mutineers fell back, leaving the line free, while two of their number rolled into the sea, slain by the double-barreled pistol held in the hand of Hugh Talbot.

A cheer from the life-boat crew at this act was echoed by many on board the wreck, while the young sailor said sternly:

"Now let more come, sir, for I can carry a dozen yet."

"Bravo, my fine fellow, you have taught these mutineers a lesson they will not forget," cried Captain Ferncliffe.

Then once more the good work went on, until the life-boat was loaded down and Hugh Talbot called out:

"Hold! I dare not carry another man, sir, but I will yield my place to you, and wait on the wreck for the boat's return."

A cheer greeted these words, but Captain Ferncliffe answered:

"I thank you, my man; but Frank Ferncliffe is not one to seek safety at another's peril."

"Cast off, and return as soon as you can—Hal another boat!"

As he spoke there suddenly dashed up alongside of the life-boat the surf-skiff.

Great God! Stella, have you dared come out a night like this?" cried Hugh Talbot, in startled tones.

"Yes, Hugh, for I would not ask you and your brave crew to face a peril I dared not meet," was the plucky answer, and every man broke forth into a ringing cheer at the act of the daring girl.

"Come, Stella, take my place in the life-boat, and I will carry the skiff back," cried Hugh.

"No, I shall remain where I am, and my boat will hold half a dozen—quick, Hugh! cast off, if you would get back in time to save the others, for do you not see how the old wreck reels under the blows?—and hark how her timbers shriek!"

Thus admonished, Hugh Talbot cast loose from the wreck, while Stella, having already made a line fast to her skiff, called to the crew to come on board one at a time.

Again did Burr Mabrey and his brother officers

refuse to go at the command of their captain, and six seamen were soon on board the surf-skiff, which was at once cast loose, and, refusing the aid of a sailor who offered to row, Stella seized her oars, and away the light craft darted over the wild waters, driven before the gale.

By the lightning glare which ever and anon rent the blackness above their heads, those on the wreck watched the retreating boats until they disappeared from sight in the shadow of the land.

Now and then some poor fellow, utterly worn out with the struggle, would be caught upon the breast of some giant wave and be torn from his hold and be carried, with a wild cry of despair, off over the foam-lashed waters, while his companions could stretch forth no hand to save him, and would shudder, as the hull beat savagely upon the bar, fearfullest their moment of doom had come too.

Instead of dying out, as all had hoped, the tempest seemed to increase in fury, and most anxiously the score of men still clinging to the shattered hulk turned their gaze landward, hoping to catch sight of the returning life-boat.

Thus the moments dragged themselves away like hours, and hope began to fade in the stoutest heart as the reeling wreck told them that soon all must be over.

Had the life-boat been swamped when near the beach?

Had her brave crew, after once facing death, refused to again dare the fury of the storm?

Such were the questions the men asked each other, until again was heard Burr Mabrey's clarion voice:

"Boat ho!"

Wildly the hoarse cheers burst from every throat, to again have each man hold his breath in awful suspense at the words:

"It is the surf-skiff! The life-boat is nowhere in sight."

"The surf-skiff! Great God! then the life-boat has deserted us, and that brave girl has dared come where men dare not follow her," cried Captain Ferncliffe, while Burr Mabrey said in a low tone:

"The surf-skiff holds but six, and we are twenty-one; thirteen of us are doomed!"

CHAPTER V.

OUT OF THE DEPTHS.

THE discovery made by Lieutenant Burr Mabrey, as he clung with his shipmates to the wreck, that it was the surf-skiff and not the life-boat returning to their succor, cast a gloom upon all, and even Captain Ferncliffe felt despair gnawing at his heart.

The thought that the crew of the life-boat having held back, where a young girl had daringly risked the peril, was a surprise to them, and Captain Ferncliffe regretted that he had not held forth to their rescuers a hope of a large reward, to urge them the more to take the risk.

That the wreck could not last many minutes longer, under the blows of the mountains and the pounding of her keel upon the bar, was very evident, for the once stanch craft was now almost battered to atoms, and it was a mooted question as to whether she would not scatter her wooden bones upon the sea, before the surf-skiff arrived.

Whether despair, knowing that all could not be saved, made the cramped hands of several seamen release their grips, or not, no one could tell, but out in the darkness, rising above the howling winds and roaring waters, burst a wail from human lips, followed by another and another, until three more unfortunates went down into the dark depths of the ocean.

"There are ten of us now. The surf-skiff must hold us all," said Lieutenant Mabrey to his commander.

But Captain Ferncliffe shook his head sadly, and answered:

"No, we are ten; it can hold but six, and four of us are doomed, Mabrey!"

"Ha! the surf-skiff has gone! no, it was hidden by that huge wave!" cried Peyton Manning, the young midshipman, who had kept his eye constantly upon the coming boat.

"Look, Manning, and see if the life-boat is anywhere visible," said the captain; and he added:

"The salt spray has almost blinded me."

"No, sir; the life-boat is not in sight," answered the middy.

"Take a close look under the shadow of the land."

The middy obeyed, and again said:

"No, sir; the surf-skiff alone is visible upon the waters."

"God bless that brave girl!" muttered Captain Ferncliffe, and from every lip came a fervent:

"Amen!"

Then no one spoke for some minutes, and every eye not blinded by the spray was fixed upon the coming boat, while the wreck trembled, swayed and groaned fearfully, the winds howled in gleeful fury at the ruin they made, and the waves went shoreward in mountain-like masses, that made the earth fairly tremble as they struck the beach.

Yet facing the danger, the surf-skiff came on,

leaping from wave to wave at times, to sink down from sight the next moment in a valley of waters.

Nearer and nearer it came, until suddenly a blinding flame descended from the inky blackness above, and seemed to set the sea ablaze, revealing objects far on shore to those whose eyes could meet the glare.

"Captain Ferncliffe, a man guides yonder surf-skiff!" shouted Burr Mabrey.

"And the girl?"

"She is not there, for I saw that it was a man's face that turned and glanced at the wreck when the lightning came."

"Thank God the girl risked not the danger again, and Heaven aid the brave fellow who comes to our aid— Ha! the wreck is breaking up!"

"Spring into the sea, men, and strive to reach yonder boat!"

The voice rung like a trumpet, and in obedience the men sprung from the wreck into the seething waters, and struck out through the foaming caldron for the little surf-skiff.

Then following a crashing of timbers, a greater howling of the winds, a more savage roar of the waters, and the wreck of the Crocodile had gone to pieces.

Here and there arose a cry as some poor man sunk beneath the waves, and here and there some bold swimmer grasped a piece of drift-wood from the wreck, while others had to depend upon their own strength to keep from being dragged down into the depths.

"Ho, there! catch at the life-lines that hang over my boat!" cried a clear voice to a swimmer near.

It was Hugh Talbot, and the one he called out to was Captain Ferncliffe.

"Ay, ay, sir," came the answer, and the next moment he was in the strong grasp of the young sailor, who dragged him into the skiff with an ease that showed remarkable strength.

"Now, sir, I'll steady her with the oars, while you look out for others," cried Hugh, and almost instantly came the hail:

"Ho, Mabrey! is that you?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Steady as you are, and grasp at the ropes as you go by!"

"Ay, ay, Captain Ferncliffe, and I thank Heaven that you are safe," came in the clear tones of the young lieutenant.

An instant of suspense, and then Burr Mabrey's life was saved.

Then followed a seaman, next the boatswain of the schooner, and last Peyton Manning, the middy, who was taken from a piece of wreck to which he was clinging with one arm broken.

And over the wild waste of waters the search was continued, but without further result, and Hugh Talbot let his light skiff, so heavily laden, drive landward before the gale, a proud smile upon his face, and the feeling in his heart that he had won the praise of Stella, and saved his foes from death.

CHAPTER VI.

A COWARD CREW.

WHEN the life-boat left the side of the wreck on its perilous run to the shore, Hugh Talbot determined that he would not leave the surf-skiff far astern, but in it was the one being whom he held dearer than all else in the world, and, should the light craft go down with her heavy load, he swore in his heart to save her, did he have to hurl several of those in his craft into the sea to make room for the maiden.

But Stella was a real child of the sea, and handled her light skiff with a skill that was wonderful, while it had also been built by Hugh Talbot himself in such a way that it was in reality a life-boat.

While the young sailor ordered his men to "keep rowing and steady her with your oars," the surf-skiff came driving down astern, and on the wake of the life-boat, Hugh Talbot determined to keep her there.

As the two boats went landward, the seas drove them, tossing them about, and threatening to swamp them beneath the mountain waves, but each, guided by nerve and skill, eluding destruction, and running safely into the mouth of the river out of the savage blows of the ocean and the fury of the winds.

"Ho, lads, keep your places, and back to the wreck, for there are others who demand our aid," cried Hugh Talbot, as he saw his men throw down their oars as the life-boat touched the beach.

"No, Captain Hugh, I for one will not touch oar again this night, after the danger we have gone through," cried one of the crew.

"Nor I, Cap'n Hugh, though I'd do much for your sake," said another.

"Lads, will you desert those brave men on the wreck when it lies in your power to save them?" asked Hugh Talbot.

"I'll pull an oar, cap'n, if the men we saved will go back for their shipmates," said a young sailor, who had not risen from his seat at the oar.

"What say you, men, will you pull back for your comrades?" called out Hugh.

Not a voice answered among the seamen, but

the surgeon and a middy promptly stepped forward and signified their readiness to go.

"The boat must have eight oarsmen," called out the young captain.

Still no response, and, finding that authority would do no good, Hugh Talbot sprung ashore and walked to the surf-skiff, which just then touched the beach.

"Men, yonder cravens of your wrecked vessel, excepting two officers refuse to pull back with me to the wreck to save your shipmates, and I want five volunteers here."

"I will go, sir," said a junior lieutenant, promptly.

"And I, sir," responded a sailor.

"I must have three more."

No others spoke up, and without a word more Hugh Talbot shoved the light skiff off and sprung into it.

"Hold, Hugh! where would you go?" cried Stella, seeing his act.

"To give what aid I can to those poor men, Stella."

"Stay, Hugh, do not go alone, for the skiff will not hold them all."

"Come, men, I for one volunteer to pull an oar, and we need seven more."

"Who answers?"

The same five who had before stepped forward now did so again, but no others moved.

"Men, the life-boat demands eight trained oarsmen in a gale such as this, and we six could not manage her."

"See! yonder brave lad goes alone to rescue your shipmates; will you not follow?" cried Stella.

Not a soul moved, and the maiden turned to the crew of the life-boat and continued earnestly, as she saw the life-boat rapidly disappearing seaward.

"Carl! Norton! Ben! you will not certainly refuse to follow your young captain?"

"We did our duty, Stella, and did it well, so let these men aid their messmates," said one of the boat's crew.

Stella was in despair, but she could do nothing more, and the crowd sought shelter under the lee of a bank to await there the result of Hugh Talbot's daring trip out to the wreck.

It seemed hours to them, in their suspense of waiting, before a voice cried out:

"The skiff is returning."

Unheeding then the spray-laden winds they gathered upon the river beach and soon the surf-skiff touched the shore, and those who had not the courage to go a second time, now burst forth in cheers for the daring man who had.

"Where are the people, Stella?" asked Hugh Talbot, as, utterly exhausted, he stepped on shore.

"They are at the hamlet, for no one has come near the shore; but God bless you, Hugh, and I know you will let me return in your place for the rest, as you are fagged out."

"Bless you, my noble child, but there are no more," said Captain Ferncliffe, sadly.

"No more? But there were more than these five left there."

"The wreck has gone to pieces, my sweet girl, and those of us who have survived owe our lives to you and this handsome youth."

"In the name of my Government, my officers and crew, I thank you both until a more befitting recognition is given you," warmly said the captain.

"We have our reward, sir, in saving your lives," said Hugh, coldly, and then he added:

"Come, sir, for you and your men can find shelter in our humble homes to-night."

"Run on ahead, Stella, and tell our people that they have shipwrecked strangers to care for."

Stella darted away, calling to several of the life-boat crew to accompany her, while Hugh Talbot followed slowly on behind with the unfortunate crew of the Crocodile.

As they drew near the group of huts that formed the little hamlet, lights flashed here and there, and soon doors were thrown open and the wrecked mariners were bid welcome, the captain and Burr Mabrey going to the home of Stella's parents, the other officers accompanying Hugh Talbot, and the men being made comfortable in the dwellings of other denizens of the hamlet.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WONDERFUL SAILOR.

THE fishing-hamlet where the crew of the wrecked Crocodile found hospitable shelter was the home of a bold and hardy race of mariners, who had had the Government eye upon them for some time, on account of alleged lawless acts in which some of them engaged.

The little village, as I have said, was picturesquely situated under the shelter of a forest-clad hill, and the trees about the rude houses concealed them from view of vessels passing along the shore, and also protected them from the chill easterly winds.

Some of the cabins arose to the dignity of cottages, and there was an air of neatness about these that showed refinement in their occupants.

The denizens of the hamlet called themselves fishermen, and they were half-farmers as well,

as back from the sea they cultivated land sufficient to raise their own produce and some for the markets of New York, whither their trim fishing-smacks were wont to carry fish, though hardly with sufficient regularity to show that their sailing-masters depended wholly upon the sale of their cargoes for subsistence.

A fleet of three little vessels, ranging from two to ten tons, were anchored in the river, and innumerable boats strewed the white beach, which gave to the hamlet of but three hundred souls an air of importance.

There were some people who called these hardy people the Buccaneers of Barnegat, while others gave them the name of the Manasquan Smugglers, and rumor had it that there was one or more vessels belonging to them which were never seen anchored peacefully with the rest of the fleet in the little haven.

The two most important abodes in the hamlet were those occupied by the Talbots and the Stanfords.

The Talbots were the oldest settlers in the hamlet, old "Captain Dan," as the head of the family was called, having built the first house there, and it was said had sought the place to hunt for a treasure buried there long years before by his father, who, report said, had been a pirate captain.

Others had built near the home of Captain Dan Talbot, and thus had sprung into existence the hamlet as the reader finds it upon the opening of this story.

Eben Stanford, the father of Stella, was another important personage in the little fishing village, for he kept the only store there, had received a good education, and was called "Squire," as to him was generally left the settlement of all disputes of the villagers, his word being law when he decided a case as he deemed with justice.

The band, for they were nothing more, were certainly, under strict discipline, making and enforcing their own laws, and woe be unto him who would break them.

Thus it was when Carter Hayes, the young sailor, had accused his officer, Hugh Talbot, of treachery, and met with prompt punishment, not one had stepped forward to prevent the sequel which they felt must follow.

When Hugh and Stella had boldly gone to the rescue of their foes, the villagers had turned away in anger and sought shelter in their houses against the fury of the tempest.

But the more they discussed the matter, the more they decided that the young sailor and the maiden were right, for, as Squire Stanford said:

"It will be a great thing for us, lads, and turn suspicion from us, when it is known that we served the crew of a Government vessel, and, in spite of the peril that my Stella has to face, I am glad that she has gone to their rescue."

This reasoning at last turned the tide, and the hardy seamen were just preparing to go to the beach and lend a helping hand, if in their power, when Stella burst into her home with the news of the rescue, and that shipwrecked mariners craved their hospitality.

At once it was given, housewives bringing out dry clothing, and maidens cooking a hasty supper for the unfortunates, while the courage of Hugh Talbot and Stella was upon every lip.

As soon as he made his guests comfortable in his father's house, Hugh Talbot left them to be entertained by his parents, while he sought the cabin of Carter Hayes, who dwelt alone with a widowed mother.

A doctor had been sent for to a village some miles inland, but was ill and could not come, and the wounded man lay on his cot, his life hanging by a thread.

Into the room Hugh Talbot went with light tread, and was met by the glaring eyes of the woman who hung over her boy.

"What do you want here, Hugh Talbot?" she asked, savagely, while the closed eyes of the wounded man opened and met those of the one who had shot him down.

"I came, Mother Hayes, to see if the doctor had been here, and if I could do aught for poor Carter," was the response, in a kindly tone.

"You gave him the wound that laid him there, Hugh Talbot, and woe be unto you if he dies," was the hoarse response of the mother.

"For his sake and for yours, Mother Hayes, not to speak of my own, I hope he will get well."

"What says the doctor?"

"The doctor is ill and could not come, boy."

"Ah! then I will soon have one here to see him who can serve him well," and Hugh quickly departed from the cabin to return in a few minutes, accompanied by the surgeon of the Crocodile.

"Doctor, this young man I shot to-night, and I beg of you, for the sake of those who love him well, to save his life," said Hugh.

The surgeon walked to the side of the cot, laid his hand upon the pulse of the wounded man and noted its beating.

Then he took from the pocket of his coat a small case of instruments, and another of medicines, and laid them by his side.

With breathless anxiety Hugh Talbot and the poor mother watched his every movement,

saw him probe the wound in the broad breast, and then carefully dress it.

"Surgeon, that man shot me down, and I ask you *will I live?*" asked Carter Hayes, in a firm but low voice.

"Your wound is not fatal though dangerous," was the reply.

"Holy Heaven, I thank Thee!" groaned the woman, in a voice full of tears, while the eyes of the young sailor flashed with joy.

But, suddenly turning them upon Hugh Talbot, they fairly blazed with rage, while he said hoarsely:

"Go!"

With pale face Hugh Talbot turned away, and wended his way back to his own home, glad in his heart that he had not slain the one who had been his friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD NEPTUNE'S DAUGHTER.

UNTIL long after midnight the storm raged, the winds sighing dismal requiems through the pines, the waves keeping up a thunderous base upon the shore, and the rain pouring down in torrents.

But the morning sun rose in a clear sky, the wind had sunk to a gentle breeze, and only the roar of the surf told of the angry sea of the night before.

Coming out from their comfortable room in the Stanfords' easy home, Captain Ferncliffe and Burr Mabrey looked sadly toward the ocean beach, where lay the remnants of what had once been their beautiful vessel.

Already some of their men were before them, and here and there the bodies of the dead had been drawn upon the sands and awaited burial at the hands of their shipmates.

Returning to the cabin, at the call of Stella, the two officers sat down to a delicious breakfast of broiled fish, white biscuit, honey and coffee, and in spite of their hardships and regrets enjoyed the meal.

Then the seamen of the wrecked schooner were called together by the shrill whistle of the boatswain, and a sad cortege wound its way up from the beach to a sequestered spot upon the hillside, where graves had been dug for the dead.

Over them Captain Ferncliffe read the service for the dead, and into their last earthly homes they were lowered to rest, their shipmates and the fishermen of the hamlet standing by with uncovered heads.

"Squire Stanford, will you tell me who it is that I am to talk to, in regard to taking myself and crew up to New York?" asked Captain Ferncliffe, as they turned away from the new-made graves.

"Yes, captain, Hugh Talbot has a trim fishing-smack, large enough to take you all," answered the Squire, who was a man of advanced age, yet with a form strong and upright, and a face that was both bold and cunning.

"Ah! that is the gallant young sailor to whom we owe our lives?"

"Yes, sir; it was Hugh Talbot that went to your rescue, along with my girl Stella."

"And a noble, beautiful girl she is, Squire Stanford, and one whose face comes back to me like some dream of the past, and yet I know that I can never have met her before, for she is hardly more than a child in years."

"Sixteen her next birthday, captain; but I am going to the beach where I see that Hugh has gone, and I will send him up to my cabin to see you."

"Do so, please, and in the mean time I will stroll about here and enjoy the view," and Captain Ferncliffe walked slowly on up the hill, while the Squire went down toward the beach, for he was most anxious apparently to get the wrecked crew away from the hamlet.

Arriving at the summit of the hill, Captain Ferncliffe started slightly, as he came suddenly upon a grave, and standing by it, leaning upon a cross at its head, the slender form of Stella.

Her back was toward him, and she did not hear his approach, but seemed absorbed in the view spread out before her, with the sailors going back to the beach, the fishermen greiling for spoils among the debris of the wreck, the hamlet below her, and the limitless ocean beyond.

"Do I intrude, my child?" asked Captain Ferncliffe, softly.

She started at his voice and turned quickly toward him, while she said simply:

"Oh, no, sir, for I am only enjoying the view, and this is a favorite place of mine."

"Ah! the grave of some friend, or perhaps of one who was bound to you by kindred ties?" he asked, with true sympathy in his look and tone.

"It is the grave of my mother, sir," she answered.

"Your mother?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, I thought that Mrs. Stanford was your mother, for so you called her."

"No, sir, my mother lies in this grave and has rested here ever since I was a little baby."

"Some few years ago Hugh erected this cross to her memory, and cut with his knife the inscription, and it was so kind of him."

He now saw the inscription cut into the wooden arm of the cross, and read it with uncovered head, while Stella stood by gazing upon him with a feeling of admiration and respect.

"My poor child; and you were the baby girl of whom this sad story is told?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your mother lost her life, but her brave arms clasped you in close embrace and you were saved?"

"Yes, sir."

"How strange a story, and how deeply I feel for you that your mother should have been wrecked in sight of her home."

"But it was not my mother's home, sir, though it has been mine since that night of shipwreck, and I have learned to love father and mother Stanford as though they were my parents in reality."

"But I never knew my mother or my father," and the young girl spoke in a tone of intense sadness.

"But you know who your parents were, surely?"

"No, sir, I know nothing of them, other than that my mother's name was Stella, for that name was engraven in this ring which she wore," and she held forth her hand, upon the third finger of which was a massive gold ring in which were set rubies forming the name of Stella.

One glance at it, and Captain Ferncliffe turned deadly pale, while, seizing her hand, he cried in suppressed tones:

"Good God! that ring I know well."

"Where did you get it, girl?"

"It was taken from my mother's finger, and given to me by mother Stanford," answered Stella, surprised at his manner.

"And your name is Stella?"

"Yes, sir, but they call me Old Neptune's Daughter, because I was not drowned that awful night."

"And your other name?" asked Captain Ferncliffe, in the same low, excited tone.

"The name of La Vaseur was— Oh, sir! what have I said to pain you, for you are deadly pale!" cried the maiden, in alarm.

In a voice that quivered came the reply:

"My child, joy has sent the blood in torrents to my heart, not pain, for though I have lost my vessel, I have found my daughter!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE THREAT.

A TRIM-LOOKING fishing-smack, with Hugh Talbot at the helm, and his life-boat crew on board, carried Captain Ferncliffe and his men up to New York.

But the young sailor seemed sad from some cause, and indignantly refused the liberal reward which the captain offered him in consideration for his valuable services, saying frankly:

"I save human life from a sense of duty, not for pay, Captain Ferncliffe."

"But you will allow me to pay you for the services of your vessel and crew in bringing us up to the city," said the captain, as the smack headed in the early morning following its departure from its river anchorage.

"No, captain Ferncliffe, our services to the shipwrecked are free," was the cold reply.

The officer was piqued at this refusal, for it left him so thoroughly in the debt of the young sailor that he felt the obligation most keenly.

"Then I will repay you in another way, Captain Hugh, for as you are a perfect sailor, I will secure you a berth as midshipman in the navy."

The eyes of the young man flashed from some inward thought, and his face flushed; but he said, coldly:

"I thank you, Captain Ferncliffe, but officers of the navy are supposed to be gentlemen, and I am but a poor fisherman."

"No, sir; I must be content to remain where I am and what I am."

"You know best; now kindly say to Miss Ferncliffe—"

"Miss Ferncliffe?"

"Yes—my daughter; for I suppose you have heard that in the lovely girl whom you call Old Neptune's Daughter I have found my child?"

"Yes, sir, I heard so."

"Then kindly say to Miss Ferncliffe that I will come down for her within the week, though I cannot tell on what day."

"I will deliver your message, sir," and accepting the proffered hand of the officer, Hugh Talbot gave the order to cast off, and the little smack swung away from the shore, amid a rousing cheer from the men whose lives had been saved by the daring of her young commander.

Away down the harbor flew the fleet craft, and, as the wind was fair, the sun was yet half an hour high when she dropped anchor in the Manasquan river in the midst of the other vessels of the fishing fleet.

Landing, Hugh Talbot walked straight to the home of the wounded man, and was met at the door by Mother Hayes, who had seen him coming.

"I have called to see if there was any change for the better in Carter, Mother Hayes, during the twenty-four hours I have been away."

"He is better, and will live to avenge the wrong you did him, Hugh Talbot, and it is not your fault that he is not dead," was the angry response of the woman.

"I am glad that he is better," simply responded Hugh, as he turned his steps toward his own home.

"Well, boy, you are back?" said Captain Jack Talbot, who was seated in an easy-chair before his door.

"Yes, father."

"And you saw our foes safe in New York?"

"I did, sir."

"I hope that your act will bring no trouble upon us, boy; but there are those in this village who regard you with suspicion for not letting those men drown."

"So be it, father; but I am no traitor."

"I know that well, my boy," answered Captain Jack, as he was familiarly called, and who had a face bold to recklessness, and was considered the best seaman in the hamlet fleet.

Walking on to the home of Stella, Hugh was told that she had gone upon the hill, and thither he went, for he knew where to find the maiden.

Straight to her mother's grave he bent his steps, and there he found her, bowing upon the cross and weeping.

"Stella!"

She started and sprang toward him, while she cried:

"Oh, Hugh! I am so glad you have sought me here, for I am so lonely, so blue."

"I have a message for you from your father, Stella."

"Ah! from Captain Ferncliffe, not father Stanford?"

"No, from Captain Ferncliffe, *your father*, Stella."

"He told me to say that he would come for you within the week, though he knew not what day."

"I thought that he was to have you carry me up in your smack, Hugh?"

"It seems that he has changed his mind, for he said something about getting a friend's yacht and running down for you."

"Ah, me! Hugh, this is all so sudden," sighed the maiden.

"He is then, you believe, your father, Stella?"

"Yes, there is no doubt of it."

"I had hoped there was, Stella."

"No, for he told me how he had been ordered away from Charleston suddenly, and was forced to leave my mother, who was ill, behind him."

"Then he had a letter from her telling him of my birth, and promising to come North on a packet ship as soon as she could do so."

"She departed with her maid, and with me, a tiny baby, Hugh, and the Hebron went to pieces on this coast, and my mother, as you know, was dragged out of the sea by father Stanford, and I was found alive in her arms though she was dead."

"My own father told us that the Hebron was the name of the vessel which she had sailed on, that she was never heard of, and it was supposed had foundered at sea with all on board, and more, he told us of a locket which my mother wore and in which was her picture and his."

"Mother Stanford found that locket about my neck, and though the miniatures were painted eighteen years ago, it was easy to recognize my father's likeness."

"No, no, Hugh, there is no doubt, for even my heart tells me he is my father."

"And you are happy in this thought, Stella?" said the young man, and she saw in the gathering twilight that his face was white and his brow clouded.

"I am happy in the thought, Hugh, that I know who I am; but I shall be very sorry to have to leave those I love here."

"And we can never meet again, Stella?"

"Oh, Hugh, do not say that, for you will come to see me often, will you not?"

"No, Stella, for you go to New York to become a fine lady, and you will soon forget, ay, *hate*, the fisher lad, the *smuggler*, for I must say it, that you leave here."

"Why, Stella Ferncliffe, ere long you will send an armed force down upon us, when you know how they talk of us all that is bad."

He spoke bitterly, and the maiden wheeled upon him with flashing eyes, while she said in an angry tone:

"Hugh Talbot, how dare you speak thus to me?"

"Do you think me a traitress to those who saved my life and have nurtured me through all these years?"

"Do you call me a traitress to you, you whom I have loved with all my heart?"

"No, no, you do not know me, Hugh Talbot, for, be you and all here what you say, and let me become what I might, I will ever be as true as steel to you."

With her last words she burst into tears, and drawing her toward him he said, earnestly:

"Forgive me, Stella, forgive me, I implore you; but I was maddened by the thought of losing you; but come, the night is upon us, and

mother Stanford wished me to bid you come at once home."

Silently she walked away with him, while out of the shadow of the cedars came a man's form and halted upon the spot where they had stood, while raising his clinched hand he shook it after them, and hissed forth, from between his shut teeth:

"True as steel you will be to Hugh Talbot and to us, will you, sweet Neptune's Daughter?"

"Well, you shall see that my little plot will not go wrong, and that before one week you will be bewailing your act that cast my love beneath your feet."

"Go on, my loving gulls, and hope for joy; but there is one who sails in your wake that will break your pinions before you fly too high, and reap his revenge for the misery you both have brought upon him."

CHAPTER X.

HUGH TALBOT'S RIVALS.

A STRANGE calm seemed to rest on the Manasquan fishing-hamlet, after the departure of the crew of the wrecked schooner-of-war Crocodile.

There were some old heads that were shaken ominously, and evil to the hamlet was prophesied, while others seemed to think that the saving of the Government crew would turn suspicion away from them.

Then a bitter blow had fallen upon the little village, by the loss they must sustain by Stella having found her own father, and many sincerely wished that Captain Ferncliffe had been drowned that night of storm, rather than, through his escaping, be the means of tearing from their midst Old Neptune's Daughter, the idol of the hamlet.

From her earliest infancy Stella had been the protegee of every man, woman and child in the fishing village, and though she was claimed as the daughter of Squire Stanford and his wife, who had no children, she was considered to belong to the community.

A waif from the waves, a real child of the sea, cast by the waters upon their shores; she was the adopted daughter of all, and her beauty, loving disposition and pretty ways had endeared her to every one.

Ere she had hardly entered her teens she had beaux by the score, among the young fisher-lads, and even old weather-beaten bachelors had wanted her to become the idol of their households.

But Stella had a preference, and she did not hesitate to show it, and that fortunate individual was Hugh Talbot.

The handsomest lad in the village by far, he was also the best boy sailor from his seventh year up, and his courage had been proven so often, with his skill in managing a craft, that when he was twenty, Captain Jack Talbot, the commander of the fleetest and largest smack in the waters, had yielded to his son as captain, though he was still the head and front, the admiral of the fleet.

Now Hugh had loved Stella also, and thus the two had grown up together as lovers, greatly to the jealous rage of several young fishermen, and particularly of Carter Hayes and Caspar Knowles.

The former was the coxswain of Hugh's lifeboat, a handsome young man, more prone to evil than good, with a love for dissipation, though a good seaman.

His feeling of jealousy against Hugh Talbot had caused him to take the stand he did the night of the storm, and which so nearly cost him his life.

Caspar Knowles was another youth of much the same stripe, with a love of gambling and dissipation added to his other vices.

He possessed a handsome face, stalwart form, commanded a small smack, and hated Hugh Talbot as cordially as he loved Stella Stanford.

He had offered his heart and hand to Stella, and the offer had been refused.

He had entreated her to love him, and she was not moved by his entreaties.

Then he had threatened her with his revenge if she refused, and she had laughed at him and told Hugh, who had publicly given the ardent youth a sound thrashing, and in turn had been warned to look for a day of reckoning.

Thus matters stood at the time this story opens, and though Stella had never promised Hugh to become his wife, for the simple reason that he had never thought it necessary to ask her, both she and her lover looked forward with hope to such a consummation, when the maiden had added a few more years to her life.

Stella, under the tuition of Squire Stanford and his wife, who were both well educated, and yet, for some mysterious reason, sought a home among humble fishermen, had been taught much that those about her did not know, and she had become a great reader, while Hugh had bought her a guitar, and she soon learned to accompany herself upon it in singing, for she possessed a voice of rare richness and power.

And to keep pace with his sweetheart, Hugh had become a hard student too, and thus the two had raised themselves above the ignorant masses about them.

As it must be confessed, the truth may as well be told that the fishermen of the hamlet were in reality smugglers.

Their little crafts were used, it is true, in catching the finny tribe, and running to the New York market with them; but often at night, had a close watch been kept, far out upon the sea, some of those same fleet fishing-smacks might have been seen lying alongside of some large vessel bound into port, and receiving from her a valuable cargo that was to dodge the revenue.

Taught by such an experienced hand as Captain Jack Talbot, it was no wonder that Hugh soon became an adept at smuggling, and his ventures were always so successful, that the old admiral had had built for him a large vessel, which extended its lawless acts to the Canadas, Bermudas, and the West Indies.

Of course Stella knew of this, and yet, reared in the atmosphere in which she had been, she did not look upon smuggling as such a terrible crime, though she was aware that it was illegal, and that punishment would follow the capture of the smugglers.

When other bands of lawless men along the coast had been frequently raided by Government vessels, the fleet of Admiral Talbot had been able to dodge the cruisers under the guise of honest fishermen, and, where now and then one of the little smacks had been captured, not a single one of the crews had ever turned traitor, so close was the tie that bound the river community together.

Thus matters stood, when Carter Hayes, lying wounded and hovering between life and death, swore retribution upon Hugh Talbot, and Caspar Knowles, hearing from his hiding-place in the cedars what was said by the lovers, made his threat to be avenged upon his rival and the young girl who had spurned his love, and instigated by jealous rage, the rivals would allow no obstacle to stand in the way of their hatred.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAREWELL.

It may be that Hugh Talbot could not bear the thought of seeing Stella depart from the hamlet, where he had known and loved her for long years, that caused him to sail away in his little vessel the day after the interview between the two upon the hill, and it may be that he went off on some cruise of profit.

But certain it is that he got his crew together on his vessel and sailed out at night, without so much as a word of farewell to Stella.

It was a sad blow to her when she saw his vessel flying out of the harbor, without his telling her good-by, and she could not for a while believe that he would really go, and expected to see him put back.

But she hoped in vain, and her eyes grew dim with watching, until she saw the vessel disappear in the darkness to seaward.

All that night she tossed restlessly upon her pillow, for she could not understand why Hugh had treated her thus; but toward dawn she dropped into a deep sleep, from which she was awakened by mother Stanford telling her that a pretty pleasure-craft was off the river firing a gun for a pilot to come out and run her in.

"And, Stella, I think it must be your father that has come for you," she said, bursting into tears.

Stella also began to cry, and dressed herself slowly, while she looked out of the window and saw the "Admiral," Captain Jack Talbot, going out in his boat to act as pilot.

"Oh, mother Stanford, have I got to go and leave you all?" cried the young girl, for, high-born as she was, she had been reared in humble life, and those about her she loved most deeply.

Refusing to taste her breakfast, Stella sat and watched the Admiral board the pretty pleasure-craft, which was a large sloop-yacht, and its sharp prow was at once turned in toward the river.

Upon the deck she did not see her father, as she turned her spy-glass upon the vessel, but she saw two young officers whom she recognized as Lieutenant Burr Mabrey and a midshipman whom she had seen among the crew of the Crocodile.

Running to an anchorage the yacht let fall her mud-hook, yet still kept her sail set, while Captain Jack rowed Lieutenant Mabrey on shore and the two started for the cabin of the Stanfords.

"Well, Stella, this is a dark day for us, for this officer comes from your real father, to take our Daughter of Neptune from us," said the Admiral, as he came up, accompanied by the young officer, who remarked pleasantly:

"It gives me pleasure to tell Miss Ferncliffe that I have been selected by her father as her escort to the city."

Poor Stella blurted out a few words in response, and then seemed to utterly break down.

But after a while she recovered her self-control, bade farewell to her adopted parents, and, with the Admiral carrying her little hair trunk, which contained all of her simple wardrobe, she went toward the river beach, escorted by the officer and the Squire.

Then another ordeal had to be passed through, for the entire population of the hamlet had as-

sembled to witness her departure, from the oldest weather-beaten fisherman to the youngest babe in arms.

A kiss for the women, a grasp of the hand for the men, and Stella, blinded with tears, stepped into the Admiral's boat, followed by Burr Mabrey, upon whom all scowled malignantly for taking from them their idol, their Daughter of Neptune and Child of the Sea.

The Admiral seized the oars, while the crews of the smacks at once made for them in a way that made the lieutenant, who liked no: their angry looks, think that they intended to take the maiden from them.

But the Admiral laid his boat alongside of the yacht, the light anchor was hauled up, and the vessel's prow was pointed seaward, amid the creaking of blocks, the orders of skippers to their crews, and the "heave-yo!" of the men as the mud-hooks of the smacks were dragged on board.

Away sailed the little yacht, with Stella upon her deck waving her kerchief to the women and children on the shore, who kept up a chorus of "Good-byes," and "God-speed-yous," while in the wake came the fishing fleet of a score of vessels with sails all up, and flags flying.

"You are having a royal send-off, with a fleet as an escort, Miss Ferncliffe," said Burr Mabrey.

"I did not believe they loved me as their actions now prove," answered Stella, and then she added; "Oh! they have all been so good to me that I can never forget them."

"And we will not forget Old Neptune's Daughter," warmly said the Admiral, giving the tiller a shove to port, and gazing fixedly out to sea, as though to hide that it hurt him to see the girl go from their midst.

At last an offing was gained, and Admiral Jack brought his boat alongside to depart, while the fleet of swift-sailing fishing-smacks, as soon as the yacht luffed up and threw the wind out of her sails, shot by like race-hounds.

"Good-by, Stella, and have you any word to send to Hugh?" asked Captain Jack Talbot, with just a slight tremor of the voice.

"Yes, tell him good-by for me," was the low response, as she grasped the hand of the man and wrung it.

"Good-by, Stella, and remember, if the world goes wrong with you, for there are sorrows in the rich men's homes as well as beneath humble roofs, and if you need friends, come back to those who love you."

Without another word, or waiting for a reply, he sprang into his light skiff and seized the oars, while the yacht's sails once more filled and she glided along at a speed that soon placed her at the head of the fleet once more, fast as were the little smacks.

When the last one had been dropped astern, the crews of all broke forth in one long, loud cheer, and then put back toward their haven, leaving Stella to go on her way alone among strangers.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MYSTERIOUS SMACK.

CONTINUING her way along the coast toward New York, the yacht, on the deck of which sat Stella Ferncliffe, gazing sadly back upon the old familiar scenes, was nearing Sandy Hook just as the sun went down beyond the western horizon, when above the low point of land was descried the raking mast of a vessel carrying a large spread of sail, and heading seaward.

Lieutenant Mabrey had tried to comfort Stella by directing her attention to other scenes, and telling her what a grand home her father was preparing for her in the city, and with grounds that ran down to the water's edge, so that she could have boats at her pleasure.

But the young girl smiled sadly, and said, simply:

"He is very kind, and I only hope my father will not regret finding his daughter."

"That could never be," answered the young officer, and finding it severe up-hill work to console her, he left her to the bent of her humor, for he felt for her in her sorrow at parting from those whom she loved, to go among those whom she would have to learn to love, even though one was her own father.

"That craft carries a crowd of sail, and runs along like a hound on the trail," said the lieutenant, as he saw the masts and sails of the craft before referred to, over the point of Sandy Hook.

The midgy, whom he addressed, answered in a low tone:

"I have been watching her for some time, sir, and she was lying at anchor up under the Highlands, with a man in her rigging, as though he was a lookout, and when we drew nearer she got up sail, and there she is about to cross our bows, from her present course."

"I wish you had spoken of this before, Mr. Norton, for night is coming on, and this is a bad place to be with as pretty a craft as this is after nightfall, as there are smugglers who would like her immensely for their use."

"But I guess we can show anything in these waters a clean pair of heels."

"If not, sir, we can beat them off, for we have eight men in crew, besides you and I," said the gallant midgy.

"And they would not attempt to take us unless they could double our force."

Then turning to the man at the tiller, he called out:

"Keep her off, helmsman, so we will have plenty of sea room, for I do not like yonder fellow's rakish looks."

"Ay, ay, sir!" drawled out the helmsman, who, with the rest of the crew, were seamen from the wrecked Crocodile; and the wind being upon the port beam, he let the yacht fall off a few points, so that she headed as though to run on across toward the Long Island shore.

"Let me have your glass, sir, please," said Stella, and the officer, handing it to her, watched her closely as she placed it to her eye and turned it upon the coming craft.

He saw her face slightly change color, and he asked quickly:

"Do you know the vessel, Miss Ferncliffe?"

"Yes, sir."

"May I ask what the craft is?"

"The Yellow Jacket."

"Ah! then may I ask if that implies that she is to be dreaded?"

"I should give her a wide berth, sir."

"Indeed! then you recognize her as a lawless craft?" he said, with surprise.

"I recognize her, Lieutenant Mabrey, as a craft to be avoided, because her commander is my foe," was the calm response.

"Indeed! you astonish me; but then he does not know that you are on board."

"I may wrong him, sir, but I was told that he meant harm toward me, and I saw his vessel over in the Shrewsbury as we came along below here, and I noticed a man on the lookout up in her rigging."

"Now I see her coming there, and recognizing her, I cannot but think her commander means mischief either to your vessel or myself."

"Then I shall at once find out," replied the lieutenant, and he gave the order to square away before the wind, and run directly out to sea.

It was now twilight, and as the yacht changed her course, the Yellow Jacket shot into view from behind the point of Sandy Hook.

Upon her decks were fully a dozen men visible, and that the yacht was her game, there was no longer any doubt, for she headed straight away in chase.

"She is very fast, but I think the yacht can outfoot her," said Burr Mabrey, as he saw the little vessel rushing on, and he did not exactly like the way in which Stella shook her head, as though she knew the smack, for such was the craft, could overhaul them.

But a few moments proved that the smack certainly was the fleetest on the point of sailing they were then on, and Lieutenant Mabrey changed the course of his vessel once more, bringing the wind upon his quarter, while he himself took the helm to get all out of her that was possible.

Darkness had now fallen upon the sea, but the shadowy form of their pursuer in hot chase could be seen, not a quarter of a mile astern, and steadily gaining.

To throw her off his track Burr Mabrey handled his vessel with consummate skill, now running dead before the wind, then flying along with the sails close-hauled, and then heading directly into the wind.

But the smack followed his every maneuver, and each change but seemed to bring her nearer the yacht.

Burr Mabrey had hoped to get the best of his pursuer, so that he could run into New York Bay, hoping that his enemy would not dare follow him through the Narrows.

But the smack had the wind of him, and was so skillfully handled that he could not double on her.

It was evident that the young officer was worried, though he was outwardly cool, for to have his captain's daughter taken from him would be a terrible blow upon him, after he had been selected as her escort to the city, her father being detained by orders that kept him in the city.

He did not doubt but that Stella was the object of the pursuer's attention, from what she said, and he surmised that it was her lover, perhaps Hugh Talbot, who was determined to kidnap her from him.

But he would defend her with his life, he made up his mind, even if, as it pained him to believe, she would be willing to be run off with by the handsome young sailor.

"Miss Ferncliffe, as it is evident that yonder craft will overhaul us, may I ask that you go into the cabin? for I shall open a fire upon her," said the officer, when he saw that the smack was walking along in his wake at a pace that must soon bring him alongside.

"If I remain on deck, Lieutenant Mabrey, you will have the advantage, for your fire will not be returned," was the quiet reply.

"Thank you, but I do not desire to protect myself by seeking refuge behind a lady," was the quick response.

"As you please, sir; but I will remain upon deck," said Stella, coldly.

"Then I will fire upon them, if they answer not my hail satisfactorily."

"Stand by, Mr. Norton, to turn that little signal-gun upon yonder smack, and have the men ready with their muskets!"

"Ay, ay, sir," promptly responded the midgy, and a moment after the little howitzer was in position aft, and the eight seamen stood ready with their muskets.

Then in a voice that rung out over the waters, just tinged with the light of the rising moon, Burr Mabrey shouted:

"Ho the smack, ahoy!"

"Ahoy the yacht!" came back the answer, and Stella said quickly in a low tone:

"It is his voice."

"Did you speak, Miss Ferncliffe?" and Burr Mabrey turned upon her.

"To myself only, sir."

"What smack is that?" called out Burr Mabrey.

"The Yellow Jacket," came back the response.

"Who and what are you?" cried Lieutenant Mabrey.

"Pirates, if so you will," was the defiant response.

"Ready there! fire!"

The howitzer was fired by the young midgy just as the eight seamen pulled trigger, and with the flashes of red flame the deadly missiles were sent upon the smack.

This quick response to their last words, from brazen throats, evidently took those on board the smack by surprise, especially as they were hit hard by the shot, and momentarily the little vessel was thrown into confusion and fell off her course, while, with a ringing cheer from the crew, the yacht was quickly put away, as Burr Mabrey was anxious to try once more to reach the harbor while his enemies were demoralized by his fire.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SMUGGLER'S PERIL.

THOUGH the mysterious smack had been thrown off its course by the fire of those on the yacht, it was on account of the helmsman falling dead at his post.

But quickly, though several of the crew had been wounded, and the ball from the howitzer had cut its way through the rail, the stern orders from her commander brought things to rights in a moment, and the smack was at once in chase again.

This time the pursuer seemed to come on with greater speed, as though the mask was torn off, and the end must soon come.

In vain was it that the yacht's crew kept up a steady fire, for the crew of the smack was sheltered, and the helmsman crouched low in the cock-pit, so that other than the bullets striking and splintering the deck and mast no harm was done, for the howitzer, it was found, had but three charges on board, and became useless.

On flew the yacht. Burr Mabrey at the helm, and Stella standing by his side, and rushing along in the wake came the smack, steadily gaining.

Forward on the yacht the midgy and the crew loaded and fired by platoon, but without apparent damage, and in silence their fire was received, those on the chase neither returning it, or uttering a word, but persistently holding on like a bloodhound on a trail.

Nearer and nearer drew the smack, until the sharp bowsprit forged past, and to windward, and then, seeing that the fight must come, Burr Mabrey luffed sharp up, his example being followed by the helmsman of the other vessel, and the two pretty vessels lay alongside of each other, with the pursuers pressing upon the deck of the yacht.

In vain had the young officer urged Stella to retire to the cabin, for she persistently refused, and seeing that she would remain on deck, the lieutenant had rallied his men amidships to meet the boarders, so that she would be as much out of the range of the firing as possible.

And over the bulwarks came a score of young men, armed with pistols and cutlasses, and though met with a brave resistance, they swept back their foes, and trampling upon the dead and wounded, drove Burr Mabrey aft.

"Kill him, and all of them, for dead men tell no tales!" shouted the leader of the attacking party, as he sprang forward and crossed his cutlass with the slender blade of the young officer.

But suddenly a form glided between the combatants, the blades were knocked up with a pistol-barrel, and Stella cried, in a voice that rung out clear and sharp:

"Drop that sword, sir, or you die!"

There was no mistaking the girl's words, and they were made forcible by a pistol pointed full in the face of the young leader of those who had boarded the yacht.

"Hold, Stella! that man is my foe!" cried the young sailor.

"And he is my friend," was the quick rejoinder, and then she added:

"Harm him if you dare!"

"His crew are dead, and tossed into the sea by my men, so why spare him?" urged the man.

"Because I will it so, Sir Pirate, for such you have proved yourself to be," was the scornful retort.

"I am no pirate, Stella, and you should know why I gave chase to this yacht."

"I should know! What do you mean?"

"I mean that I would not see you carried off by others; that I love you, that you belong to us, and not to strangers, and I have come to keep you from them, to make you my wife."

The man spoke earnestly, and with a manner that showed he felt deeply.

But the answer came in scornful, cutting tones:

"And you know that I hate you."

"Ha! you hate me, do you?"

"Well, love or hate you shall be mine, for I have sworn it, and now, before your eyes, I shall silence the last tongue that can say aught to put the rope about my neck."

As he spoke, the young smuggler again turned upon Burr Mabrey, who all this time had stood calmly upon the stern of his vessel, his pistols empty, and his sword his only weapon with which to defend himself.

"Come on, Sir Smuggler, Pirate, or whatever you claim to be, and I will save this young girl a life of misery," cried the brave young officer, stepping forward to confront his foe.

One glance was sufficient to show Stella that the heavy cutlass would shiver the light blade of the officer to atoms at the first stroke, and she also discovered the smuggler crew preparing to rush upon her protector, so she called out:

"Back! and spare this man, for if you attack him, or your men fire upon him, I swear to shoot you down!"

There was no doubting but that she would keep her word, and the smuggler leader hesitated and turned to his men as if to ask what to do.

"You know Neptune's Daughter, cap'n, and that she'll keep her word," said one.

"Better let up on the luff until a more favorable time," remarked another, under his breath.

Before a decision was come to, suddenly there rung out:

"Sail ho!"

All started, and cast their eyes over the sea, while Stella, who had already caught sight of the vessel, said quickly, and in a low tone, to Burr Mabrey:

"Quick! into the cabin, and I will follow you, for I know that craft."

"After you, Miss Ferncliffe," was the calm response.

Seeing that he would not lead the way, she seized his arm, and together they bounded into the little cabin, wheeling instantly to confront the smack's skipper, who sprung after them.

"Don't press me, or I will fire!" cried Stella, while she leveled her pistol full in the face of the young man, and Burr Mabrey stood by her side with drawn sword.

The daring young skipper looked as though he was about to spring forward and risk the shot, when a voice from the deck called out:

"Cap'n, your prize is safe, so don't lose time, for yonder craft coming hain't to be fooled with, as you'll see, ef you takes a squint at her."

Thus urged, the skipper wheeled and walked on deck, and his voice ringing out the orders to cast loose from the yacht and run for it, proved that he had recognized the fact that the strange sail was not a vessel to be trifled with.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SMUGGLER CAPTAIN'S BOLD GAME.

"You say you recognized the vessel, Miss Ferncliffe, which you saw heading down upon us?" asked Lieutenant Mabrey, when the two were left alone in the cabin of the smack.

"Yes, sir."

"Was it a cruiser?"

"No, sir."

"I confess that I did not see it, for I had not time to glance around me, so will you tell me what vessel it was?"

"I would prefer not, sir."

"Ah! is there a mystery about her?" asked the officer in surprise.

"If she overhauls this craft, then you will know, sir; but if she fails to do so, I would rather that you should not know," was the reply.

"As the pirates are flying from her, I certainly can judge that she is their foe, so will hope that she overhauls us, though she will have a fleet craft to catch."

"She is a fleet craft, sir, and I believe will catch us; but oh! how deeply grieved am I that I have cost the lives of that brave young midshipman and your men, and given you so much trouble."

"I regret the death of my companions, Miss Ferncliffe, most deeply; but they met the death a brave sailor must expect to die, for they fell defending their vessel."

"As for myself, I am ready to die in the same good cause, so do not blame yourself, as both your father and myself believed that there would be no danger in running the yacht down for you in daylight, and, as it was, had the wind been heavier, we could have held our own with the smack, if not escaped her."

"Yes; it is too late to repine, though I feel pained at the loss of your crew, whom those wretches cruelly cut down; but their day of

reckoning will come!" and her eyes flashed fire, as the light of the cabin-lamp fell upon them.

Of course, hidden from the view without, neither Burr Mabrey nor Stella could tell how the chase was progressing; but that the smack was doing her best was evident, as she was careened far over, and they heard her crew throwing water on her sails to add to their weight and push her along.

The wind was increasing, too, with the rising of the moon, and the smack fairly flew through the waters.

Excepting an order now and then, no sound was heard upon her decks, and this gave the prisoners in the cabin, for they were nothing more, an idea that the chase was a serious one.

Then a voice, which Stella recognized as the skipper's, said:

"If I had not thought that he would follow the yacht, I never would have risked Hart on board with a crew and given him orders to head for New York with all speed."

"He didn't even look toward the yacht, cap'n, but just come after us," was the response.

"Well, fast as the Yellow Jacket is, she can't show her heels to that craft, and I should have known it."

"What are you going to do, cap'n?" came the question.

"I intend to play a trick, so stand ready to wear ship, and we'll put back and hail him."

"He doubles us in crew, now Hart and the four boys went on the yacht, and five of our lads got killed in the chase and fight."

"Fool! do you think I intend to attack him?" was the angry response.

"I didn't know, cap'n, for you is mighty risky."

"Wait, and you will see."

"Stand ready to about ship!"

And around the smack swept as though on a pivot, and headed back on a course that would bring her across the bows of her pursuer.

"He is playing some desperate game," said Burr Mabrey, who, with Stella, had overheard all that had been said.

"Will it win?" answered the girl, in a low tone.

"We shall soon see," said the lieutenant.

"Yes; and upon its success or failure depends your fate and mine, Lieutenant Mabrey," rejoined Stella, in a low tone, while she added a moment after, in the same impressive voice:

"And God help both of us if the bold game now being played upon this vessel's deck is won by the man who guides its destinies!"

CHAPTER XV.

THE GHOST OF THE SEA.

STANDING at the foot of the companionway of the smack, Stella and Lieutenant Burr Mabrey could hear all that passed upon the deck, for the door was open and one stood upon either side, ready to oppose the entrance of the skipper or his crew, if need be.

Stella grasped her pistol firmly in her right hand, while the young officer had thrown aside his light blade for a heavy cutlass he had found in the cabin.

As the words of the smack's commander, in his conversation with his mate, had told them that the vessel that had caused them to run off had been gaining so rapidly that to escape was impossible, they waited to see what would be the result in the bold move in putting about and standing back to meet the very craft which, a few moments before, the smugglers had been flying from, for it is needless to say to the reader that the vessel that held them prisoners was one of the fleet belonging to the hamlet where Stella's days had been passed.

The conversation of the two men above deck, as one stood at the tiller, and the other in the cockpit near him, had told the officer and the maiden also that the yacht had been sent off by the cunning skipper to try to draw their pursuer in chase, but had failed to do so.

Thus, in suspense, the two inmates of the cabin waited the end, which they knew must soon come, for the smack was bowling along at a tremendous pace under the increasing wind.

What the cunning plan of the skipper would be to save his vessel they could not imagine, but certainly he must feel confidence in himself, or he would not boldly go back to meet a foe from whom he had been flying as though in fear of his life.

"Keep her so as to cross his bows!"

"Steady as you are. Now she will pass astern!" the officer and maiden heard the smuggler captain say to the helmsman.

Then an instant after they heard the words:

"By Heaven! but he holds on as though to make us fall off or go about!"

"Will he dare do it?"

"Yes, cap'n, he'll dare do anything he sets his notion on," was the reply of the helmsman.

"Then I will hail now," and loud rung out the words:

"Ho, the Sea Ghost!"

"Ahoy, the Yellow Jacket!" came back in clear tones.

"Ha! it is the Sea Ghost, and I have heard that voice before!" cried Burr Mabrey to Stella, but she only smiled and made no reply.

Then they listened, and the skipper of the smack shouted back:

"I give it up, Captain Hugh, your Ghost can outfoot the Jacket; but I was determined to give you a trial."

"Are you bound for the river?"

"Ah! that is his game, to make Hugh believe he was running away from him for a race; but will the trick deceive him?" said Stella, and they listened for the answer from the other vessel.

It came at once.

"What yacht was that, Caspar Knowles?"

"A pleasure-craft out of New York; but she was not worth overhauling—Ho, there, luff, or you will be into us—luff sharp!"

"My helmsman has his orders, Knowles."

"Luff yourself."

The reply brought a curse from the lips of Skipper Knowles, but he luffed sharp himself, and instantly following the example of the smack, the other vessel brought her bow up into the wind and lay to.

"That was hardly fair, Hugh Talbot, to bring me to," cried Caspar Knowles, whom the reader now knows to be the captain of the smack Yellow Jacket.

"I wished to speak with you, Knowles," was the answer.

"All right; if there is any work to be done, I am with you."

"I will come on board," cried Caspar Knowles.

"No, it is my intention to visit you."

"But my boat is lowered now, and—"

"It matters not, I shall board you," firmly said Hugh Talbot, and he added:

"I shall bring company, too."

The next moment his boat left the side of his vessel, while Caspar Knowles, darting down into the cabin, hissed forth:

"One word of alarm from either of you, and your lives shall pay the forfeit."

Burr Mabrey made no reply, while Stella laughed, and the smuggler turned to leave the cabin, when, with the bound of a panther the young officer was upon him, his cutlass was wrested from his hand, and, shortened as a dagger, was held above the heart of the amazed outlaw.

"You are my prisoner, sir!" said Burr Mabrey, calmly, while Stella, running up the companionway, called out, as the boarding boat touched the side:

"This way, Hugh, while your men look to the Jacket's crew!"

With a bound Hugh Talbot was upon the deck, and he was followed by a boat-load of men, all armed heavily.

Running to the companionway, where Stella stood, for the moon was at its full and shone with remarkable brilliance, he leaped past her into the cabin and confronted Burr Mabrey and his prisoner.

"Ah! you are already in durance vile, Caspar Knowles!"

"So be it, and pity it is that your captor did not drive his blade into your coward heart!" said the young sailor, sternly.

"What means this outrage upon my vessel, Hugh Talbot?"

"By Heaven, but you shall answer for it!" cried the infuriated young pirate.

"It means, sir, that I learned of your plot to kidnap Stella, on her way to the city, and at the same time hold her father, whom you expected would come for her, for a large ransom."

"Determined to thwart you, I set sail and laid in wait for your act of piracy, and I have caught you at your despicable work."

"Curses upon you, Hugh Talbot! you have ever been the bane of my life!"

"Take care that you do not make me the destroyer of it."

"But, Caspar Knowles, now that I have your prisoners, I have no desire to be hard upon you or your crew, so I will release your vessel, and I give you my word that I will make no report against you at the haven, nor shall my men."

"You have failed, and I have triumphed, so let the matter rest there."

"You are generous, sir; but I shall have a score to settle with this pirate, and I ask you to secure him, his vessel and his crew for the Government," said Burr Mabrey.

"Pardon me, sir, but I cannot do so."

"And yet he cut my crew down without mercy upon their deck," indignantly said the lieutenant.

"I regret his red act, sir; but I shall let Caspar Knowles, his vessel and his crew go free, and your quarrel with him must be settled at another time upon the high seas."

"I simply take you from his power now."

"And you will release that man, Hugh Talbot, to come down upon our homes with his seamen, burn our hamlet, capture our vessels, and string our brave lads up to the yard-arm?" cried Caspar Knowles.

Hugh Talbot's face flushed, and turning to the young officer, he said in a low tone:

"Lieutenant Mabrey, I have just saved your life, and within the hour I shall place you in command of the yacht once more, with some of my men to act as your crew, and I make a request of you—not a demand."

"Name it, sir."

"It is that you pledge your word not to betray the secrets that you have discovered to-night."

The officer looked troubled, and turned his gaze upon Stella, who said, softly:

"Your betrayal of a few guilty would punish many innocent ones."

"Will you not give the pledge when it is asked, not demanded?"

"If I refuse?" and the officer turned to Hugh Talbot.

"Then, sir, you shall, as I said, go free, and we must bear the punishment of what shall follow."

"You are a noble fellow, Hugh Talbot, and I give the pledge; for, if I cannot capture you and the band of outlaws to which I believe you belong, by fair means, I will not do so by foul—and there is my hand upon it."

The two men grasped hands, and turning to Caspar Knowles, Burr Mabrey continued:

"But as for you, sir, I shall not forget you, and, when I can meet the Yellow Jacket and her crew, the rope-end shall be their end, I assure you."

"Do you trust that man, Hugh Talbot?" cried Knowles, excitedly.

"Yes, and the least you can say, the better."

"Come, Stella; you and Lieutenant Mabrey are to be my guests until we can overhaul the yacht, which the Ghost will soon do," and Hugh Talbot led the way on deck, where the eyes of Burr Mabrey fell upon the Sea Ghost, lying to not far off, and he gazed upon the little schooner with deep interest, as one that had been such a daring smuggler, and eluded every attempt of the cruisers to capture her.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WELCOME.

GOING on board of the Sea Ghost, Hugh Talbot ushered the young officer and Stella into a neat little cabin, where supper awaited on the table for them, and he remarked:

"I delayed my meal that I might have the company of yourself and father, Stella, for I did not know that he had sent Lieutenant Mabrey in his stead."

Having given his orders to stand after the yacht with all speed, the Sea Ghost went off like an arrow, while the Yellow Jacket headed toward the haven in the river, her skipper and crew in a most sullen humor.

After a light repast, Hugh Talbot and his guests went on deck, and the young officer gazed with admiration at the beautiful schooner, which, not over forty tons' burden, was carrying immense clouds of canvas and fairly shooting through the moonlit waters.

She was painted white, hull, masts and spars, and with her snowy sails, was not inappropriately named the Sea Ghost.

Her wonderful speed also won the admiration of the lieutenant, and he said with enthusiasm:

"I do not wonder, Talbot, that none of our cruisers can capture this craft, for she fairly flies."

"She is very fast, sir, and a stanch craft too, for I have had her out in ugly weather with canvas set that you would think would run her under or capsize her, yet she stands up well," and the young smuggler captain gazed at his beautiful vessel with pride.

"We are overhauling the yacht very rapidly," said Stella.

All gazed at the pleasure-craft ahead, and before long she was within hail.

"Ho, the yacht!" hailed Hugh Talbot.

"Ahoy, the Ghost!" came back the surly answer.

"Lay to and I will come alongside of you."

No answer was returned, and Talbot cried out sternly:

"On board the yacht there! did you hear?"

"Ay, ay."

"Then obey!"

The yacht swept up into the wind, and the Sea Ghost was laid alongside of her most skillfully.

"Now, Lieutenant Mabrey, I will lend you five of my men to run you up to the city, and they will know where to join me after you have dropped anchor."

"Now, Stella, we must part, and, as you go to a home of wealth, and a loving father, and I wear the brand of smuggler upon my brow, I fear this will be our last meeting and our farewell!"

Hugh Talbot spoke in a tone of commingled bitterness and sadness, and it touched both the maiden and Burr Mabrey, the latter remarking:

"My dear Talbot, you are too noble a man to remain what you are, so cast the past behind you, give up your reckless, lawless life, and start anew, for you are yet a mere youth, and have a brilliant career before you, if so you will it."

"Ah! lieutenant, the die is cast with me; my fate is predestined, and I must drift with the tide that bears me upon its bosom."

"Farewell, sir, and Stella, good-by!"

She felt the last link severing that bound her to the past, and, with the impulse of her pas-

sionate nature, she threw her arms about his neck and kissed him.

Then she sprang away from him and dashed into the yacht's cabin.

"You men come on board the Ghost!" called out Hugh Talbot, to keep back the emotion that choked him, and in obedience the men from the Yellow Jacket left the yacht, while five of the schooner's crew took their places, and at once the two vessels swung apart.

Away flew the yacht, once more under Mabrey's command, straight for New York harbor, while the Sea Ghost, under shortened sail, hung in her wake, as though to be near should she need further protection.

At last the yacht entered the Lower Bay, and the smuggler at once headed down the coast.

As the two vessels widened the distance between them, Stella came out of the cabin and gazed in silence over the moonlit waters.

One of the crew was at the helm, and Burr Mabrey stepped to her side as she stood upon the starboard quarter gazing at the now far distant smuggler, looking indeed like the ghost of a ship upon the waters.

"A noble fellow commands yonder craft, Miss Ferncliffe," said the young officer.

"Yes, Lieutenant Mabrey, Hugh Talbot is a noble man, and I feel that you will not betray him," earnestly said the maiden.

"He has my pledge, Miss Ferncliffe."

"True, and I feel that you will keep it."

"If you were to break it, it would bring ruin, misery and death upon all that I love, for be those people what they may, they have been my friends, and I have been brought up in their midst."

"I know that their acts are lawless, yet their creed has been to risk their lives in smuggling, and only of late have I begun to feel how great a sin they have committed, and I know that Hugh abhors the life, though he is the most daring smuggler in the band."

"I can well believe that of him; but, tell me, Miss Ferncliffe, how we can report this affair to-night, for I shall have to report the death of those under me!"

"Simple enough, sir."

"Pray aid me then."

"Report that a coast pirate pursued and captured the yacht, making you and I prisoners, after they had slain the midshipman and seamen."

"Yes."

"Then a craft under command of Hugh Talbot gave chase and rescued us."

"Such shall be my report, and I will evade all curious questions as best I can; but the Government will consider this same Hugh Talbot worthy of a berth in the navy, and what then?"

"Let it be offered him, and I believe that he will accept it."

"No, for he flatly refused a commission which your father offered to procure for him."

"Indeed!" and it was evident that Stella was pained to hear this; but she made up her mind that her father should get the commission, and that she would offer it to her lover.

Then, if he refused it, she would feel that he preferred the reckless life of a smuggler to one of rank and honor and her love.

Soon after, the yacht was gliding past the city, with its innumerable lights and busy hum, and shortly after dropped anchor in the Hudson in front of a lordly mansion that stood upon the river-bank.

Innumerable lights gleamed from the windows of the elegant house, and as a boat left the side of the yacht with Stella and the young officer, a joyous company assembled upon the shore, invited by Captain Ferncliffe to welcome into a new life the lovely Daughter of Old Neptune.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT HOME.

NEW YORK, at the time of which I write, kind reader, was little like the grand metropolis of to-day, for where now stand massive business marts, then were lordly homes, and only sailing-vessels were visible gliding about its grand harbor.

An event, therefore, of such importance as the finding of the daughter supposed to have been lost at sea in her infancy, of a man holding the position that Captain Ferncliffe did, could not but set the town agog with excitement.

Holding high rank in the navy, a man who had distinguished himself on many occasions, and socially stood as a leader, Captain Ferncliffe was a central figure in the metropolitan life of that day, and those who had felt for his sorrow at losing wife and child now flocked about him to offer congratulations that the sea had given up at least one of his loved ones.

The loss, too, of the Crocodile was an exciting topic of conversation, and, added to the adventure of Stella on reaching her father's home, there certainly was enough of exciting interest hanging about the Ferncliffes to make them more than a nine-days' talk.

Met by her father's intimates, and ushered into a house than which none in New York was more elegant, though in her Sunday dress as a

fisher-girl, the Daughter of Neptune was not in the least taken aback.

Her father could have sent to her elegant clothes, in which to robe herself, but he remembered the exquisite beauty of her face and form, her innocent manner, and he wished her to be seen as she was, without the addition that dress would make.

Calm as a May morn, Stella met her father's guests, greeting them with a natural grace, dignity and *naivete* that was very winning, and showing herself not in the least abashed by her presence in their midst, dressed in her simple attire, which could in no way compare with their elegant costumes.

At the request of Lieutenant Mabrey she told the story of their chase by a coast pirate, the capture of the yacht, and then the coming up of Hugh Talbot, who had witnessed the affair, and their release.

"Do you mean that the pirate's smack, as you describe her to be, my child, overhauled the yacht, which is known to be as fast as any small craft in these waters?" asked Captain Ferncliffe, as they all sat in the grand parlors after their arrival.

"Yes, sir; the lieutenant tried the yacht dead before the wind, on the wind, close-hauled, and with everything set that would draw, taking advantage of every puff to forge ahead, but the pirate sailed like a witch, and it was no use, in spite of our howitzer and muskets."

All laughed at this nautical description of the chase, and the commodore of the fleet in New York waters, who was present, said admiringly:

"Why, Miss Stella, you are a born sailor."

"I should be, sir, as the Daughter of Old Neptune," was the ready reply.

"And yet, Stella," continued her father, "although the yacht is so fleet, and the smack still faster, you say that this craft of that gallant young Talbot overhauled the pirate with greater ease than he had run down the pleasure-craft?"

"Yes, sir."

"He must have a marvelous smack for speed," said the commodore.

"He has, sir," dryly said Burr Mabrey, with a glance at Stella.

"Was his smack anchored with the fishing-fleet the day I was there, Stella, for I would like to get her model for a pleasure-craft?"

"No, sir, she was not in the haven then."

"I am glad your fishing friends of the coast are not given to smuggling, Miss Stella, as they get the credit of doing, for with such fleet vessels, the Government cruisers would have more than they could do to look after them," said the commodore.

"It was too bad that the gallant young skipper who rescued you, Miss Ferncliffe, should have set the pirates free," said a gentleman present.

"What else could he do with them, sir, for, though having the fleetest vessel he could bring the pirates to terms, as far as making them give up Lieutenant Mabrey and myself, he had no authority for their capture, and did not doubtless wish to get their animosity aroused against his people on the coast," answered Stella, with a skillful manner of defending Hugh Talbot from suspicion that won her a look of admiration at her tact from Burr Mabrey.

"Well, I have already had the keel laid of a new vessel, Stella, to replace my Crocodile, and it shall be in every way the superior of that beautiful craft, and I shall make it warm for the pirates and smugglers in these waters," said Captain Ferncliffe.

"Yes, Ferncliffe, I do not wonder, after losing your vessel while cruising in search of the sea outlaws, and after what your daughter has gone through, that you feel spiteful," said the commodore.

"A good name for your new vessel, father, if you have thought of no other," remarked Stella.

"What name is that, Stella?"

"The word just made use of by the commodore—'Spiteful.'"

"By Neptune, but you have named her, my child, for she shall be called the Spiteful," cried Captain Ferncliffe, and after many a toast to the fair Daughter of Neptune and the future cruises of the Spiteful, the guests took their departure, and Stella Ferncliffe had begun her life her new home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BLACK SAILOR.

Two weeks had gone by since Stella had arrived in her new home, and, once she had entered upon her new life, it found attractions for her that caused her to feel that, love the old hamlet as much as she would, and have the old faces there often as she might in her memory, she was born for something else than to pass her days as a poor fisher-girl.

Her father's friends had flocked to pay her attention, innumerable courtesies had been shown her from all, and kindnesses had overwhelmed her.

Under the deft hands of modistes she had been supplied with beautiful dresses, her father had showered jewelry and other presents upon

her, and all she had worn with the air of one who knew well their uses and could make use of them without awkwardness.

A carriage had been given her, in which to drive out at her will, a saddle-horse bought for her, and, as she had many a time ridden the half-wild colts of the fishermen, without saddle and bridle, she at once became a fine horse-woman.

Then a sail-boat and row-boat had been purchased for her by her father, who felt no dread of accident befalling one who had alone come out in her surf-skiff that fearful night of storm when the Crocodile was lost.

After a month or two, to make herself at home, Stella was to go to a fashionable boarding-school in the edge of the city, while her father would be off cruising in his new schooner, the Spiteful.

One afternoon, a little more than two weeks since her return home, Stella walked out into the grounds to read her book in a rustic arbor overlooking the river.

She was enjoying the balmy air, and her novel together, when a shadow fell upon her, and she started to her feet as she beheld a negro before her.

He was tall, powerfully built, and was dressed in a suit of sailor clothes, and Stella's first thought was that he had come from her father's vessel with a message for her.

Before she could speak, he said in a hurried manner:

"Missy, don't git skeert, for I goin' right away, an' I on'y comed to tell yer not ter be so car'less, missy, an' don't yer go out in yer boat alone, for you has enermies, missy."

"I warns you, missy, to heed what I say to yer, an' I'll come ag'in if you is in danger."

Before she could reply the black sailor had vanished, and though she called out to him he did not heed, but gliding among the ornamental foliage of the grounds soon disappeared from view.

Never remembering to have seen him before, Stella was puzzled to account for the warning he had given her; but there was that in his honest manner which caused her to feel that she must heed what he had said.

As she stood in the door of the rustic arbor, glancing out upon the river, she suddenly uttered a cry of joy, for a small craft just then luffed up into the wind and dropped anchor, though she still let her sails remain set.

"It is father Stanford's smack, the Squire, and he has come to see me," she cried, walking down toward the landing off which the vessel lay some two hundred yards distant.

A boat at once put off from the vessel, and there were two men in it, one at the oars, the other at the tiller.

"One is Lucas King, and the other's face I cannot see," she said.

As the boat touched the shore the men both sprung out, and Stella cried, with real pleasure in her tones:

"Oh, Lucas, I am so glad to see you, and you, too, Cain."

"I know you bring a message to me from dear mother Stanford."

"Lor', Miss Stella, how you is changed, and you has finery enough on you for a queen," cried the man addressed as Lucas, as he grasped her hand, while Cain said:

"Yes, you looks a real fine lady now, and I is a'most afeered ter touch yer little hands, for they hain't brown like they used to be."

"They are just the same in their grip for old friends, though, Cain."

"But how is mother Stanford, and all?"

"Yer see the old lady couldn't stand it without seeing you, and we jist told her we'd run her up and give her a look at you."

"What! is she on the smack?"

"Sure."

"Then bring her on shore at once."

"Lor', Miss Stella, she won't poke her head out of the cabing; but begged us to come and ask you jist to run out and see her, if only to let her set her eyes onto you, and then say good-by."

"Git right into our boat, ef it won't sp'ile yer fine clothes."

"Plague take the clothes!" said Stella, with something of her old hamlet manner, and she sprung into the boat, seized the tiller, and sung out, cheerily:

"Give way, lads!"

The two men obeyed, and the boat shot out from the bank.

But hardly had it gone a cable's length when a light skiff came flying down directly upon it.

"Ho, there! hard on your port oar, or you will be into us!" cried Stella, jamming her tiller down to avoid a collision.

But in vain, for the skiff struck the bows of the row-boat and glanced alongside, while the tall form of the black sailor arose in it, a pistol in each hand, while he said, calmly:

"I run inter yer boat on purpose, missy, ter save yer from them two devils what has kidnapped you!"

CHAPTER XIX.

A PLOT THAT WENT AMISS.

THE sudden collision in mid-stream of the two boats was as great a surprise to Stella Fern-

cliffe as it was to the two seamen of the smack that lay at anchor near by, and upon the deck of which were seen two men quickly setting to work to get up anchor, when they beheld the, to them, certainly unexpected act of the black sailor.

But the maiden seemed to understand fully and at once that it was, as the black sailor said, a deep-laid plot to kidnap her, and accustomed to look after herself in many a scene of danger in the past, when an humble fisher-girl, she was determined that her hand should not lose its cunning because she had become a fine lady, and had found herself "to the manner born."

Therefore, as her black rescuer held the men at bay, as it was, for an instant, she drew the tiller out of its socket in the rudder-board and stood on the defensive, while she said quickly:

"Lucas King, I have no desire to punish either you or Cain, for bitter I know would be your punishment if I allowed my brave rescuer here to carry you ashore as prisoners, so I will let you go free, and I advise you to get out of port with all due haste, as my father will be anxious to overhaul you when he knows what you have done."

"Ther nigger lies, Miss Stella, for we wouldn't harm you for the world," said Lucas King, sullenly.

"Ther nigger don't lie, missy, as he kin prove to yer by showing dat de old lady dey said dey was taking you to see ain't on dat smack," said the black sailor, quietly.

"I believe you, my man, and I am now convinced that these men meant me harm, and are working in the interest of Caspar Knowles."

"But they were once friends of mine, and I do not care to see them suffer, so they can go, and I will ask you to row me ashore in your boat."

"Yas, missy, I do so wid pleasure; but dese sea fellers is almighty slip'ry, an' as dey sees dat dis little 'citement hain't been obsarved on shore, dey'll try yit ter run off wid yer, and take me too fer bait, as yer sees de smack am gitting ready ter run up an' take us on board."

A glance at the two men, and then at the smack, convinced Stella that the negro was right, and fearful that after all the plot to kidnap her might be successful, as there were now visible five men on the deck of the little vessel, she cried hastily:

"Quick, my man, back your skiff up to the stern of this boat, and I will spring into it."

"T'won't do, missy, for de blessid minnit dat I takes my weepin off dese men, dat blessid minnit dey gits de best ob us."

"Then what is to be done, for the smack will soon be alongside of us?" cried Stella, with some anxiety, for after the bold attempt of Caspar Knowles to carry her off, she had really come to fear him.

"You take dis weepin, missy, and shoot dem mens dead if de smack comes near us, while I rows de boat ashore; and you sees I has got one more pistol here, if dey drives me to use it."

As he spoke he handed a pistol to Stella, who at once leveled it at the head of Cain, who was nearest to her, while the black sailor sprung into their boat, and ordered Lucas King to sit by the side of his comrade.

With an oath he obeyed, and seating himself at the bow oars, the black sailor began to pull for the shore, leaving his skiff floating upon the river.

"There comes the smack," said Stella, as the little vessel, having left her anchorage, had stood off on a tack that carried her above the boat, and jibing her sail, now came down before the wind directly upon them.

"All right, missy, let 'em come; but you kin jist call out to 'em if dey don't gib us a almighty wide berth, dat you will shoot der gem-mans dead."

"Hurrah, my man! you have struck the right note, and shoot them I will, if the smack attempts our capture!" cried Stella, and as if to carry out the threat in the full sense of the word, she looked carefully at the priming in the flash-pan of the pistol, and cocking it, brought it dangerously near the head of Lucas King, who said gruffly:

"That pistol might go off and kill me, girl."

"Nebber mind, missy; jist keep it aimed right at him, and as de weepin am one ob de new kind ob double-barrel pistols, so you has a shot fer t'other man, too."

"But yer better hail de smack, missy, and tell 'em to keep off, for she's crowdin' us."

Stella saw that this was true, and recognizing the man at the tiller as one Silas Horn, she hailed in her clear, musical voice:

"Ho, the smack!"

"Ay, ay!" came the gruff response.

"Keep off, Silas Horn, if you don't wish to be the cause of the death of Lucas King and Cain!" called out Stella.

"How's we going to cause their death?" was the question.

"They shall die if you come nearer."

"We hain't goin' to run yer down."

"Keep off, I say, or they shall die!" and Stella's voice rung with the excitement of the moment.

"Who's going to kill 'em?"

"I will kill your two comrades if you do not change that vessel's course this instant!"

With the ringing words the pistol was shoved nearer their faces, and seeing deadly determination in her face to keep her threat, the two men shouted in chorus:

"Keep off, for God's sake, Si, or she'll kill us!"

Instantly the smack's course was changed, and the boat shot onward, urged by the powerful arms of the black sailor.

A moment more and Stella sprung ashore, followed by the negro, and the former said, sternly:

"Now, if you wish to save your lives, put off after your vessel!"

Without a word they seized their oars, and obeyed, leaving Stella and her brave preserver standing together upon the river bank, watching their hasty departure to rejoin the smack, which was putting back for them, and at the same time spreading more sail as though realizing the necessity of making a hasty flight after the going amiss of their well-laid plot.

CHAPTER XX.

LUZETTE'S DISCOVERY.

THE thrilling scene, to the actors therein, related in the foregoing chapter, had taken only a few minutes of time, and had been witnessed by two servants of the Ferncliffe mansion.

One of them was the old gardener, in the rear of the house, and the other was a maid in one of the upper rooms; but before they could get to the quarters of the other servants and give a general alarm, Stella had landed in safety with the black sailor, for the two who beheld the attempt at kidnapping had dreamed of no danger to their young mistress until the collision of the two boats in mid-stream, and then had deemed the negro the assailant.

"It is best not to speak of dis affair, missy," remarked the black sailor, as the kidnappers rowed away.

"I was going to ask of you that the matter be kept quiet, my man, for those people were once my friends, and I would not have harm befall them; but you who so nobly came to my rescue at the risk of your own life, shall be well rewarded."

"I asks no reward, missy, nor does I intend to take none; but de servants has seen de rumpus, and it's all out, now."

"Yes, it cannot be kept secret, now, and my father must know of it, but I will delay sending after him until the smack shall have obtained a long start," and Stella turned to greet the servants who just then came rushing up to where she stood.

There was the coachman with his hay-fork, the gardener with his pick, and then a house-maid with a broom, after which came the fat butler, with his master's sword, and the cook holding aloft a carving-knife.

Altogether, they made a most formidable-looking party, but one that was by no means dangerous to those on the smack.

"Lordy, Miss Stella, I thought they'd saw us coming," cried the fat butler, gasping for breath.

"Yes, they have run off, and I would have been with them but for this brave negro, who came to my rescue and saved me from those men," answered Stella, with a smile at the assumed valor of the party, who had hung back behind the mansion, marshaling their forces, until the boat had left the shore.

"They were pirates, Miss Stella, and would have robbed the house if they had not seen us," said the butler.

"Nonsense, Gibson, they were kidnappers, who sought to steal me and get money from my father for giving me up."

"But where is Luzette, my maid?" asked Stella, not seeing her quadroon *femme de toilette* among the intended hostiles.

"She ran off to tell your father, miss," said the cook.

"A most sensible act," said Stella, aloud, and she added in an undertone, to herself:

"But one, under the circumstances, which I deplore."

Then, turning to the black sailor, she said:

"Now, my man, what is your name?"

"They calls me Snow, missy, 'cause I's so berry brack."

"Well, Snow, I am particularly anxious that you should see my father, so come up to the house with me."

"I hab got to get my boat, now, missy, and I come see him to-morrow," and Stella seemed to read by his manner that he wished to avoid meeting her father, not caring to be paid for the good work he had done, so she said quickly:

"I will send Felix, the boatman, whom I see now coming into the grounds, to pick up your skiff, and you must await my father's return."

"Lor', Miss Stella, there goes the yacht after the smack!" cried the coachman, as he saw the little vessel in which Stella had come from the Jersey coast, suddenly come in view beyond the Battery, her decks filled with uniformed men, who were setting sail with all haste.

"Luzette has gone like a deer and given the alarm," cried Stella, while a cloud passed over her face, as she saw that the yacht must over-

haul the smack, which was only a short distance ahead of her.

As a proof that there was no mistaking the errand on which the yacht was bound, a puff of smoke came from the howitzer upon her bows, and its deep boom followed, while a solid shot struck near the smack's stern and showered her decks with spray.

"Ah! there comes Luzette now," cried Stella, as her maid, bareheaded and with flushed face, came running toward the group.

"Oh, missy, I am so glad you is safe, for I sent master word, by a gent'man on horseback, that you had been run off with by a vessel, and I showed it to him flying down the river," cried the quadroon, as she drew near.

"It was most thoughtful of you, Luzette, and your act would have saved me, had they captured me, for I see that the yacht is in hot chase of the smack; but this brave colored sailor had already saved me," said Stella, and she led the way to the house, but seeing that the negro hung back, she said:

"Come, my man, for, as you have served me so well I have a task for you to do for me which I will explain to you."

The black sailor could no longer refuse to accompany Stella to the house, and bidding him be seated upon the piazza she entered the mansion, while the servants adjourned to their respective duties.

The reason for Stella's entering the mansion, at the risk of seeing her preserver suddenly decamp, as he had seemed so persistent in his endeavor to get away, was on account of a sign given her by Luzette, who stood just inside the hall.

"Well, Luzette, what is it?" asked her young mistress, as she joined her.

"Missy Stella, that hain't no black man," whispered the quadroon.

Stella started, and asked quickly:

"Why, Luzette, what do you mean?"

"I mean, missy, that his arms are white above the wrists, for I seen 'em."

"Sh, Luzette, and do not speak of this to any one else."

"No, missy, I'll keep dark as his face," was the whispered response, and leaving her Stella returned to the piazza where the black sailor was gazing earnestly down the harbor.

Seeing her he remarked:

"De yacht hab caught de smack, missy."

It was true, for the two vessels now lay side by side in the bay.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BLACK SAILOR'S PLEDGE.

"Ah me! I am so, so sorry that the smack has been caught by the yacht," said Stella, as she saw that the little fishing vessel had been captured.

"Missy seem to like dem bad mens dat want run off wid her," said the black sailor, in a voice and dialect *a la African* that Stella could not believe was feigned.

She tried to get a glimpse of the white arms above the black wrists but could not, and, after a general look at the woolly head and dark face and hands of the negro, came to the conclusion that Luzette was mistaken in her surmise.

"I do not like the bad men, for bad they certainly are; but they belong to a village on the coast where I was reared, and I have known them all my life.

"Besides, they have mothers, wives, sisters and children whom I do love, and for their sake I am sorry, for I would not see harm befall them, and my father will certainly be most severe with them, if he does not treat them as pirates."

"Maybe he let 'em go, missy, when he don't find missy on board de smack," suggested the negro.

"Ha! that gives me an idea, my man, and I must beg you to aid me in it."

"I will do as missy tell me."

"And I will pay you well, only you must keep it as a dead secret."

"I won't take missy's money, but I serve her well."

"I do not wish you to serve me without pay."

"I got plenty money, missy, for I makes heap."

"What, as a sailor?"

"Me fisherman, missy, and catches plenty of fishes."

"Dat's how I come to see dem bad mens was going to make trouble for you, for I was fishing near dere smack las' night, when it lay ober on de Jarsey shore ob de ribber, and heard what dey hab to say."

"Ah! I had forgotten to ask you how you became aware of their plot against me."

"But see, the yacht and smack are coming back, and will doubtless anchor near where my father is building his vessel, the Spiteful, so I wish you to go in your skiff and see Captain Ferncliffe."

"Your fader, missy?"

"Yes."

"I'll go, missy."

"Tell Captain Ferncliffe to release the smack

and her crew, if you cannot pick out the two men who attempted to kidnap me."

"I kin pick 'em out, missy."

"That is just what I don't want you to do."

"Yas, missy."

"Look at all of the crew and pass over them, and then you must tell a little story, rather than have those men lose their lives."

"I kin tell a big story, missy, if you wants me to."

"I wish you to lead my father to believe that the boat did not board the smack, but went over to the Jersey shore, and that the little vessel was not engaged in the kidnapping work, only passing, at the time she was supposed by Luzette to have been."

"Yas, missy, I tell him dat, and de Lord hain't gwine to set dat lie down in de Book ag'in' me, I knows, if you tells me it am right whar life kin be sated."

"But yer fader won't b'lieve poor nigger, so you better write him leetle letter."

"I will do so; wait one moment," and hurrying into the library, Stella hastily wrote a few lines to her father.

Returning to the piazza, she said:

"I have written only a line to tell my father not to hold the smack and her crew, unless you find on board the culprits, but to look for the two men upon the Jersey coast, and to trust you fully, as I owe my life to you."

"Tankee, missy," said the negro, humbly.

But Stella did not add that she also wrote to her father to reward the negro generously, as not a dollar would he accept from her.

"Now, Snow, get into your skiff and row with all speed to join my father."

"Yas, missy."

"And remember, you are not to find the two men on the smack."

"I onderstan's, missy."

"And if my father still holds the vessel and men, you must aid me to get them free."

"I will, missy."

"You pledge this, Snow?"

"I does, missy, 'fore de Lord, for if you don't want dem mens hanged, what treated you so bad, den I helps git 'em off for you."

"And I thank you, Snow, with all my heart, and will not forget you."

"But go quickly now, for darkness will soon be here."

With a low bow the negro hastened away, and watching him, Stella saw him leap into his skiff, which Felix, the boatman, had just brought ashore, and send it flying down the river with a stroke that showed arms of great muscular power.

"He gave me his pledge, and though he has a black face, I feel that I can rely upon him fully, and should my father hold those men, the black sailor and myself shall rescue them, for no man of that dear old hand shall die where I can save them, guilty though they may be."

"How rapidly he sends his boat along!"

"Ah! Luzette, I find you are mistaken," and Stella turned to the quadroon, who just then joined her mistress upon the piazza.

"No, missy, I seen the white on him, and that black skin will rub off sure," was the positive reply of Luzette.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MISSION.

As though anxious to keep his pledge, made to the beautiful young girl whom he had already served so well, Snow went flying down the Hudson river toward the yacht and her prize.

As he drew near he was descried by Lieutenant Burr Mabrey, who was in command of the yacht, and by whose side stood Midshipman Peyton Manning, nearly recovered from his wound received on the night of the wreck, though he still carried his arm in a sling.

"I say, Peyton, did not that man turn from his oars just now and signal us?" asked Lieutenant Mabrey of the young midshipman, who instantly raised his glass to his eye, and after an instant said:

"It is a negro, sir, in a surf-skiff, and he is heading directly for us at a tremendous rate of speed."

"It must be one of the servants of Captain Ferncliffe, as he comes down the river."

"Give me your glass."

The lieutenant glanced earnestly through the glass and said:

"It is not the mansion boatman, for Felix is a white man, and as he wears a sailor uniform, he cannot be either the coachman or groom; but certainly he is heading for us, and, as you say, comes on at a marvelous rapid pace, and yet seems to row with ease—Ha! there he turns once more and waves his hat."

"Helmsman, keep her up a few points closer, for I wish to speak that boat!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came from the man at the helm, and the bows of the yacht, which had been pointing as though to run up East river, were now held on a course toward the Battery.

Upon the deck were half a dozen seamen from the unfortunate Crocodile, and astern came the smack, with a dozen more sailors in uniform, and the prisoners, nine in all.

Among the latter was the handsome, reckless-faced young smuggler, Caspar Knowles, who had on a former occasion, the reader will remember, chased the yacht in his swift sailing Yellow Jacket, and captured as prizes Burr Mabrey and Stella.

He now stood with clouded face and angry eyes, gazing at the city which they were approaching, while his men, sullen at their capture, stood near, all of them securely bound.

In a short while, at the terrific pace at which the negro was rowing, and the yacht also sailing toward him, he came within hail.

"Yacht 'ho!" he called out, in a deep voice.

"Ay, ay, the skiff!" answered Burr Mabrey.

"Want speak to you, massa, and it berry important."

"All right, my man, come alongside, and we'll throw you a rope!"

Snow rapidly obeyed, and soon stood upon the deck of the yacht, while the prisoners glanced at him in dismay from the smack.

"Well, my man, what have you to report?"

"Want see Cap'n Ferncliffe, sah."

"He is not on board, but I will doubtless find him when I land."

"Are you one of his men?"

"No, sah, but I have a letter for him from Missy Stella."

"Ah! did you just come from the mansion?"

"Yes, sah."

"And left Miss Stella there?"

"Yes, massa."

"Then you can tell me something I would like to know, doubtless."

"Yes, sah."

"I was coming through the city with my men here, when a gentleman on horseback dashed up and told me that Miss Ferncliffe had been captured by two men in a boat, and that they had taken her out to a smack which had sailed down the river."

"That smack astern was pointed out as the craft, and I at once double-quickened to the Battery, boarded this yacht and gave chase; but I did not find Miss Ferncliffe on board."

"No, sah, for you hab got de wrong boat, sah."

"Ah! can that be possible—for I saw but one smack on the river, and this was the one pointed out, surely."

"De men went off in de boat, sah, for de Jarsey shore, keepin' dat smack atween dem an' de city shore."

"What! and carried Miss Ferncliffe with them?"

"No, sah, but dey was tryin' to git away wid her when I seen 'em and took her away from 'em."

"Bravo for you, my man; but tell me which way these men went, and I'll at once stand across and land a party to go in pursuit; what did you say, Manning?" and Burr Mabrey turned to the midshipman, who responded:

"I said, sir, that perhaps the two men might have boarded the smack, and may now be upon her."

"True; you did not see them land, my man?"

"No, sah."

"You would know them?"

"Yes, sah; I know 'em."

"Well, jump into your skiff with me, and we will drop back to the smack."

Snow obeyed, and the prisoners saw him coming with considerable dread, for they did not doubt now but that he had been told all.

"These are the men who were on the smack, my fine fellow, so just see if you can point out the two who were in the boat and attempted to kidnap Miss Ferncliffe, and my word for it, you'll see them swinging to the yard-arm of the commodore's frigate anchored yonder up East river before to-morrow's sunset."

Snow stepped up before the line of prisoners, all of whom looked white and sullen, for the words of the lieutenant gave them little hope.

Passing down the line, with his eyes shut tight, Snow appeared to look into each face closely, and then said to Lieutenant Mabrey:

"I don't see 'em, sah."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sah, an' it was 'cause Missy Stella saw you arter the smack she sent me to tell her fader, who she thought were on board de yacht, dat he must let dis crew go."

"Well, my man, I do not doubt but that the two villains in the boat escaped to the Jersey shore, as you say, since you do not recognize them among these men; but they doubtless came from this craft, and I shall hold her until Captain Ferncliffe sees them, and he can force from them the truth."

Snow seemed crestfallen at this decision of the young officer, while the prisoners became gloomy once more, for the act of the negro in not recognizing them as guilty proved that he wished to befriend them.

It was with anxious hearts, therefore, that they saw the smack follow the yacht inshore to a landing, where Captain Ferncliffe and a large crowd stood awaiting their arrival, the captain's face full of dread, for a rumor had reached him that his daughter had been captured, and that the yacht had gone in chase of her captors.

CHAPTER XXIII.

TO FACE AN ORDEAL.

CAPTAIN FERNCLIFFE had been on his way to his mansion when informed by a citizen that his daughter had been carried off by a fishing-smack, which had stood down the harbor as rapidly as the five-knot breeze that was blowing would permit.

His first thought was of the yacht, as the quickest and fleetest means of pursuit, with a light breeze, and he ran with all haste to the landing, to find there a large crowd, and, to his delight, that the little vessel had not only gone in chase, but had captured the daring kidnapper craft.

"But who sailed in her so promptly?" he asked.

"The Lieutenant Mabrey, sir, was up in town with some men, and threw them at once on board the yacht when he heard the news," said a bystander.

"Bravo Mabrey! ever ready for a noble act," said the captain, and he watched the return of the yacht and her prize.

As the yacht's sharp prow came near the pier, Captain Ferncliffe sprang on board, crying eagerly:

"Well done, my gallant Mabrey; but where is my child?"

"She was rescued, sir, by this black sailor, and I only captured the craft which was pointed out as the one that carried her off, and now I am told that I made a mistake."

"Indeed! but where is Stella?"

"At home, Massa Cap'n," put in Snow.

"You know this?"

"Yes, sah. I left her dar, while I comed down to de yacht to gib you dis note she writ you," and the negro handed over the note, which the captain read with surprise.

"My daughter believed then that I was upon the yacht?"

"Yes, massa."

"And you, my brave fellow, saved her from capture?"

"I done what I c'u'd, sah," was the modest reply.

"You did nobly, and I am glad to grasp your hand; but tell me your name?"

"Snow, sah."

"Are you a slave?"

Snow hesitated in replying, and Captain Ferncliffe said quickly:

"Have no fear, my man, for if you are, I shall purchase you from your owner, and give you your freedom, and a berth on my ship besides, for your good work."

"No, massa, I hain't no slabe; but I didn't want ter tell yer I were free, as free niggers is gin'rally sich poor trash; but I t'anks yer, sah, fer yer kindness, tho' I has a good libin' now, massa."

"Well, we'll see what we can tempt you with after awhile; but now let us see what is to be done with these prisoners, who, from your account, Snow, are not guilty."

"No, sah."

"Well, Mabrey, I suppose you had better let the smack go, and I will give the crew a few gold pieces for the fright you gave them."

Burr Mabrey made no reply; but his face clouded.

It was evident that he did not wish to release the prisoners, and was anxious to fasten the guilt of the kidnapping affair upon them.

He knew Caspar Knowles well, and remembered what cause he had to feel revengeful toward him, and yet, his pledge kept him from betraying the young smuggler; but now that he had him in his power he was not willing to see him go free without punishment, and he felt in his heart that he was in some way connected, if not the leader, in the attempt to carry Stella off.

Snow might not recognize the very two men who had been in the boat, yet the smack had certainly been lying up the river, off the Ferncliffe mansion, and why was she there, if not for mischief, when commanded by Caspar Knowles?

And again, why had she tried so hard to escape him, if guiltless of wrong-doing in these waters?

Captain Ferncliffe saw that his lieutenant hesitated, and asked:

"Well, Mabrey, what have you to say?"

"I would ask, sir, that you keep this smack and her crew until you see Miss Ferncliffe."

"You think that Stella might throw some light upon their guilt or innocence?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yet you were the one who rescued her, my man!" and the captain turned to Snow.

"Yes, sah."

"From the two men in a boat?"

"Yes, sah."

"Was this smack near?"

"A cable's length off, massa."

"And coming down the river?"

"Yes, sah."

"And you do not see among her crew, yonder, the two men from whom you rescued my daughter?"

Snow turned toward the crew, and so that neither the captain or lieutenant should see his

face, and closing his eyes while pretending to look at the men, said, earnestly:

"No, sah, I does not see them two men that were in the boat."

"What more do you wish, Mabrey?"

"Miss Ferncliffe's word, sir."

"I have her letter here, which says this was the wrong vessel, and she sent this man with it to me when she believed me to be on the yacht."

But Burr Mabrey wished to see Stella face the men, and was anxious to know if she was again protecting the fishermen-smugglers from just punishment, and he responded:

"I have a little theory, Captain Ferncliffe, which I cannot make known; but I would like to see these prisoners brought to face your daughter."

"And you shall," answered the captain, who had great faith in his young officer, and he added:

"I purchased this yacht to-day, Mabrey, and we will run her right up to an anchorage off my home, and the smack shall follow us, and then we will know what Stella says."

"And more, if she recognizes her abductors, among these men, I assure you I will string them up for pirates, without trial and without prayer."

"Sarve 'em right, Massa Cap'n," said Snow, and though he had shown a desire to depart before, when he thought the smack was to be let go, he now seemed most anxious to remain on board the yacht to discover the finale of the kidnapping affair, and kept his place near Captain Ferncliffe, as the little craft glided up the Hudson, with the smuggler following in her wake over the waters, now under the pall of night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SEA OWL.

STELLA FERNCLIFFE paced the piazza in anxious thought, after the departure of Snow upon his mission.

She felt indignant at the action toward her of those who had been her best friends, now that she had been found not to be of them, and had departed from their midst.

She knew that all of the people in the coast village had hated to see her go; but she was also aware that only a few, doubtless in this last affair, as in the other, led by Caspar Knowles, would be willing to make her suffer as his course certainly did.

Still she felt that in throwing suspicion off from the smack she had done right, for many of the villagers would have had to grieve had she allowed her abductors to be taken.

Where it was her duty to deliver them up to justice, she felt, with the training she had had among them and the friendship she owed them in the past, that it would be cowardly and ungrateful in her to betray them.

Besides, she hoped that by saving Caspar Knowles and his crew, when she could have handed them over to her father for their crimes, she would make them ashamed of their acts against her.

Until the shadows of night fell upon the river she walked to and fro upon the piazza, and then adjourned to the brightly-lighted library, to await the coming of her father.

Supper awaited in the next room the return of the master, for Stella felt little like eating alone.

As she sat in deep reverie, she was startled by footfalls upon the gravel walk and then upon the piazza.

The next instant her father entered and clasped her in his arms, for the beautiful girl, whom he had known but a few weeks, had taken the place in his heart at once which she was destined to occupy, and recalled in her face and manners the young wife he had parted with long years before never to see again, only her image in the child that had been so miraculously saved from death and been reared by humble people, wild, lawless perhaps, but with good hearts to tenderly nurture the wee little Daughter of Neptune.

"Stella, my dear one, I am so happy in feeling that you are safe," said Captain Ferncliffe.

"Yes, father, and I owe my safety to a brave negro, as you doubtless know, for I sent you a letter by him."

"I received it; but it was Lieutenant Mabrey that went in chase of your kidnappers, if those he captured are such; but the negro says not, and I would have released them, had not Mabrey wished me to have them face you as well, to see if you could identify them."

Stella's face slightly flushed, but she said:

"The black sailor certainly saw the men most thoroughly, father, and if he did not recognize them, then there will hardly be any reason for me to see them."

"Well, to please Mabrey, I brought them here."

"Ho there, Mabrey! bring in those men!"

Instantly, at the loud call of the captain, there was heard the tramping of feet upon the piazza, and into the library came Lieutenant Mabrey, the black sailor, Caspar Knowles and his crew, with a guard of four sailors.

The young smuggler captain glanced quickly into the face of Stella, as he entered, and his

comrades did likewise, as though to read there what would be her action against them.

But instantly she stepped forward, and grasping the bound hand of the young smuggler, cried:

"Why, Caspar! you here, and suspected of being my kidnapper?"

"Oh, father! these are some of my people from the coast village!"

Burr Mabrey bit his lip with vexation, as he stood back in the shadow, as though wishing not to be seen by Stella, while the faces of the prisoners brightened.

As for Captain Ferncliffe, he seemed now to recall that he had before seen some of the faces of the men, and at Stella's words he said:

"Well, my child, as you fail to recognize these men as your intended abductors, they are free to go, as soon as Gibson has given them some supper and wine."

Then turning to Caspar Knowles, he continued:

"I am sorry, young sir, for this mistake, but these are troublesome times, and as your vessel was pointed out as the one from which the kidnappers had come, my lieutenant was right in giving chase and capturing you."

"But you are at liberty to go now, as soon as my butler has looked after you."

"Thank you, sir, and we do not mind the delay, or lay blame upon the lieutenant," replied Caspar Knowles, and they were about to follow Gibson, who had been summoned from the library, when Burr Mabrey, who had left the room a few moments before, entered, accompanied by two men in citizen's dress.

"One moment, my men!" said the lieutenant.

Then turning to Captain Ferncliffe, he continued:

"Captain Ferncliffe, these gentlemen are revenue officers, and they have come to make another serious charge against this young man and his crew."

"Ah! what is it now, Mabrey?" and Captain Ferncliffe turned to his lieutenant, who said:

"I refer you, sir, to Officer Brett, of the revenue."

Thus urged, Officer Brett, a bronzed-faced, daring-looking man, stepped forward and said:

"I charge these men, Captain Ferncliffe, with being smugglers!"

"It is false!" cried Caspar Knowles, defiantly, and their arms having been already freed of their bonds, the group of accused men swayed to and fro, with low mutterings, as though they intended an outbreak.

"This is a bold charge, sir, unless you can substantiate it," observed Captain Ferncliffe, calmly.

"That I can do, sir, for my brother officer and myself saw them at their work only last night, and to give proof of what I say, Captain Ferncliffe, I will tell you that I am the Government's revenue officer, Dan Brett."

"Ah! I have heard of you as a most trusty officer, sir, and I believe the smugglers name you the Sea Owl?"

"So they call me, sir, because I am always on the watch at night, and seem never to sleep."

"But these men ran their smack into Spuyten Duyvil Creek last night, and unloaded a cargo of smuggled goods into wagons sent there from the city for them."

"My comrade and myself here lay hidden and saw the whole affair, but could not capture the vessel and her crew, though we did catch the wagons on the road back to the city and confiscate the goods."

"This is false! but the charge will hold us, innocent though we are, so come, men, let us break for our vessel!" cried Caspar Knowles, in a loud voice.

But instantly Dan Brett, the Sea Owl, his comrade, and two others covered them with their pistols.

Those two others were Captain Ferncliffe and Burr Mabrey, and the former shouted:

"Without there, guard! Kill any man who attempts to leave this house until further orders!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came the response, and the guard of seamen who had brought the prisoners there and then retreated to the piazza, appeared in the doorway, while in their midst was seen the Black Sailor.

This awed the smugglers, unarmed as they were, and they stood silent, while Captain Ferncliffe said sternly:

"The men are your prisoners, Mr. Brett, and Lieutenant Burr will detail you a guard of seamen to take them in their smack to the prison-ship."

"Thank you, Captain Ferncliffe, it is a favor I shall have to ask of you."

"Come, men, you are my prisoners, and I will stand no nonsense, so hold out your hands for the bracelets!"

They knew the Sea Owl well by reputation, and silently submitted to be ironed, after which they were marched off with the guard of seamen, while Burr Mabrey remained at the mansion.

"I will join you in an instant, father," said Stella, and gliding out upon the piazza, she called:

"Snow!"

"Yes, missy," and the negro, who was accompanying the prisoners, quickly returned. "Snow, those men must be released!" "If you says so, missy." "Wait here, and as soon as I can I will come out and arrange some plan." "Yes, missy." "You will not fail me, Snow, for those men must be set free." "I'll be here, missy," was the response, and Stella went back into the library to join her father and Lieutenant Mabrey.

CHAPTER XXV.

SNOW'S BOLD ACT.

It was evident that Snow, the Black Sailor was more desirous of pleasing Stella than anybody else, even to himself.

He had suspected trouble to follow the carrying of the smuggler crew to the Ferncliffe mansion, for how could Stella get out of recognizing the two kidnappers?

True, she could tell a deliberate story; but would she be guilty of a direct falsehood to save them?

Arriving at the mansion he had hung in the background, yet where he could see and hear all that passed.

Observing the two revenue officers approach, he had met them, and he it was who had called Lieutenant Mabrey out to see them.

Not knowing what to do when Dan Brett took the smugglers in charge, and feeling that all hope for them was lost, he was on his way to his skiff, which had been towed astern of the yacht, when he heard Stella calling him back.

He had promised her to remain upon the piazza, and await her return; but, knowing that the time was very short in which to save the smugglers, as once on board the prison-ship, then anchored in the East river, it would be impossible to aid them, he determined to act at once.

Quickly he hastened on after the party, and saw that the prisoners were being taken on board the smack.

Going to the yacht, he sprung into his skiff, and rowed out to the smack just as the last boat's crew boarded.

"Massa Brett, de cap'n, sah, sent me arter yer, sah," he cried, as though he had come in great haste.

"Well, my man, what is it?" asked Dan Brett, who was just giving orders to get under way.

"The cap'n say, sah, dat he hab jist got news dat will make him take de yacht and her whole crew off to-night on a little cruise, and fer you to let me help you sail round to de prison-ship, while you send his four men on board his wessel dar."

"Well, I am willing, as the men are in irons, and three of us can easily run this smack round."

"Here, lads, return in your boat to the yacht," and the officer addressed the four seamen, who saluted with respect, and obeyed, for they had all heard of the mysterious and daring man who was a terror to evil-doers.

"Now, men, you get into that cabin, and if you attempt to come out, I'll kill you!" was the next order of the Sea Owl.

Sullenly Caspar Knowles and his men obeyed, and the smack was in charge of the two officers and the black sailor.

The sails were already up, the anchor soon left the mud, and down the river glided the smack, under the pressure of a seven-knot breeze.

Snow took the helm, at the request of Dan Brett, and he headed so as to run close over toward the Jersey shore.

The Sea Owl paced the little deck near him, while his comrade went forward and stood leaning against the mast.

"Massa, I t'inks dere is trouble in dat cabin, sah," suddenly said Snow, in a low tone, and quickly Dan Brett sprung into the cockpit, and was entering the cabin, where he was seized from behind with a force he could not throw off, and disarmed in an instant, while Snow, who had done the daring deed, called out:

"Quick, massas, jist hold him; but ef you hurts him, I won't help you."

The smugglers seemed as much taken by surprise as had been the revenue officer; but seeing that Snow was their friend, they bounded forward, and though their wrists were ironed, they grasped Brett, and held him securely by mere weight of numbers, though he was a powerful man.

Planning his bold act, Snow had lashed the helm before he called out to the Sea Owl, so that the smack had held on the course she was heading for a moment after he had left the tiller, and hence the officer had not noticed anything wrong aft.

But before Snow could get back to the helm, the smack's bow ran up into the wind suddenly, and this caused the officer to quickly change his position.

Unheeding the craft, Snow bounded forward, calling out:

"Quick, massa, we has got to let dis sail down, fer don't you see dat squall?"

The unsuspecting officer sprung quickly to the

halyard sheets and stooped over, when he found himself seized by Snow with a grasp he could not shake off.

He hailed the Sea Owl loudly:

"Ho! Brett, to the rescue!"

But just then the famous Sea Owl was in dire trouble himself, and could not respond to the call.

"No use, massa, to kick ag'in' me, for I has got de strength to hold yer," said Snow, holding his captive upon the deck.

"Curse you! you are a giant in strength, and you caught me unawares."

"Who are you?"

"My name am Snow, massa," was the quiet reply, and raising the man, who was of light weight, bodily in his arms, the negro bore him aft and into the cabin.

"Massa, here am t'other one, and I wants you to hold him too until I kin fix him, but don't yer go for to hurt him."

"Nigger, you is a darling!" cried one of the smugglers, and the others were about to cheer, when Caspar Knowles said, sternly:

"Silence! Now, my man, I am to understand that you have planned and carried out this bold plot to rescue us?"

"You hain't rescued yit, massa, but I is helpin' you all I kin, and I wants you to promise me dat you lets me hab dese two gemmans when I leabs de smack."

"You can have them; but I think the best plan would be for us to string 'em up, as they would do us."

"No, massa, dey sha'n't be hurted."

"You talk big for a nigger," said Caspar Knowles.

"I'll talk smaller den, massa, and let dese gemmans hab you ag'in," was the prompt response.

"Never! for though in irons we kin soon free ourselves."

"Come, lads!"

They moved forward to suddenly check their advance as Snow confronted them with a pistol in each hand.

"Don't let me bab to kill you, massas; but dem two gemmans hain't to be hurted nohow!"

There was no doubting the negro's intention to kill if pressed, and the smugglers fell back, dragging with them the last of the two revenue officers whom Snow had brought into the cabin.

At their act Dan Brett laughed, as though enjoying the situation, while he said, sneeringly:

"Well, smugglers, the negro is too much for you, as he was for my messmate and myself."

"Gemmans, dis yacht hab her sails up, and am going 'bout as she pleases, so de sooner we gits t'ings settled, de better fer us all," said Snow.

This reasoning the smugglers seemed to think good, for Caspar Knowles quickly responded:

"I was wrong, my man, to go against your wishes, when you were aiding us, so do as you please, only let us get out of this before we are run into by some passing craft, or a boat comes off to see what the smack's backing and filling means."

"T'ankce, massa; now you jist hold dat gemmans while I gets de keys of de irons!"

With this Snow took from the pocket of Dan Brett, whom the smugglers had bound with their neck-scarfs, the key of the handcuffs.

He also took out of his pockets two extra pair of irons and quickly slipped them upon the wrists of the Sea Owl and his comrade.

"Now, gemmans, you two jist go on deck, and I'll take you into my leetle skiff wid me."

The two officers obeyed, and Snow was just about to follow up the companionway, with the keys in his hand, when one of the smugglers called out:

"Lads, de nigger is desartin' us!"

With a yell they rushed upon him, their ironed arms upraised to grasp him.

But, wheeling, he leveled a pistol at them, and holding the bunch of keys in his other hand, cried out:

"Keep back, gemmans, or I shoots, for you don't git dese here keys until I leabs dis here boat!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CHASE OF THE SURF SKIFF.

The bold stand taken by Snow, with the fact that he was armed, and perfectly cool checked the rush of the smugglers upon him, and held them at bay, although they greatly outnumbered him.

But then they were in irons, and unarmed, and that serves in a great measure to cow a man.

"What! do you intend to leave us on this yacht, adrift, and ironed?" cried Caspar Knowles.

"No, cap'n, I intends ter set yer free, and fer dat I comed on board; but I doesn't intend thet you shall git de best ob me, or ob dem officer gemmans."

"Now you jist keep quiet, and I'll let you go all right, massa; but if you shows fight I intends to say fight, too."

"Do as you please, my man, for we are at your mercy," said Caspar Knowles.

"I knows dat, massa, and I intends to do as I pleases. Now you jist keep quiet dar."

With this Snow left the little cabin, and found the two officers standing in the cockpit, having witnessed with interest all that had transpired.

"You are as plucky as any man, white, black or red, I ever met," said the Sea Owl as he joined them.

"T'ankce, massa; now we must git out of dis."

"Leave the smack?"

"Yes, sah."

"And let those pirates escape?"

"Yes, massa."

"My man, why have you set them free?"

"Didn't want 'em hanged, sah."

"Are they friends of yours?"

"Cap'n, you says dem men is pirates, and I is a honest nigger," was the indignant reply of Snow.

The Sea Owl laughed, but said:

"Well, you take out of my hands a valuable prize in those fellows."

"Can't help it, sah."

"Now what do you intend to do with us?"

"I show you, sah, if you jist gits into my skiff."

Without a word Dan Brett got into the skiff, as Snow drew it alongside, and his companion followed him in silence.

Then the negro sprung in, cast off the painter, but still holding to the low rail of the smack, called out:

"Cap'n!"

"Did you call me?" asked Caspar Knowles, coming out of the cabin.

"Yes, sah."

"Well?"

"We is going on a leetle cruise, massa, and I wants to tell you dat you had better be going on anodder."

"How can we, bound as we are?"

"Here am de keys to unlock de irons, sah, and I wishes you good-by."

With this Snow tossed the bunch of keys into the cockpit of the smack, and, as Caspar Knowles sprung eagerly toward them, the negro seized his oars and sent the boat flying away from the side of the little vessel.

"Quick, men! Out of that cabin and I will set you free. Lose no time, for we can run down yonder skiff and those on board," cried Caspar Knowles.

His words were heard by those in the skiff, and his men were seen to crowd rapidly around him as they rushed out of the cabin.

"Quick, my man, or yonder fellows will run us down!" said the Sea Owl, as he sat in the stern of the skiff by the side of his companion.

"No, sah, I guesses we git away," coolly answered the negro.

"Impossible," for see the smack has some one already at her helm, and is wearing around," rejoined the Sea Owl.

"I see dat, sah, but we hain't making slow time."

It was true, as the two officers saw when they glanced over the side of the skiff, which the powerful arms of the negro were sending through the water at a tremendous pace.

But it was evident that the smack was coming in hot pursuit for, as soon as released of his irons, each man sprung to work to aid in the speed of the little vessel by every manner of means in his power.

With their arch foe, the Sea Owl, so near them, the smugglers were determined to risk much for his capture.

They were unarmed, their guards having carried all the weapons taken from them on board the yacht; but, in control of their vessel, and a stiff breeze blowing they would be able to hold at their mercy the light skiff, should they overhaul it.

"Pull hard for the New York shore, my brave fellow!" cried Dan Brett, with as much anxiety as he ever exhibited.

"No, sah."

"Why not?"

"If I pulls you dar, den I gits myself into a trap," was the cautious reply.

"Then pull for the Jersey shore," continued the officer.

"No, sah, I pulls down de harbor, de way I was gwine."

"Then yonder smack certainly will overhaul us and run us down."

"No, sah, I guesses not, onless de wind rises more'n 'tis blowing now, for we is gitting along 'pert," and Snow glanced back through the darkness and saw that the smack was coming on at a livelier pace, bringing along with her an increasing wind.

"Dat do look bad, sah," he said, coolly, as he changed the course of his skiff.

"It looks as if we would all be prisoners to yonder pirates before five minutes have gone by," assented the Sea Owl.

"Yes, sah, it look a little dubious; but dey hain't overtook us yet."

"You have our weapons?"

"Yes, sah, dey is in my pocket, along wid some o' mine."

"Knock our irons off and give us our wea-

pons, and we will keep those fellows off, my man."

"No, sah, for I doesn't want dem hurted, and if you gits your irons off and your weepins, den dis nigger will git into trouble, I is afeerd."

"I will not harm you, my man."

"I hain't going to lead you into de temptation to break your word, massa," was the reply, and Snow bent to his oars with a will that showed the officers that his giant strength and skill as an oarsman were holding their own against the smack.

He was now headed for the Jersey shore where, at the time of which I write, were only a few straggling houses, the lights of which were here and there visible.

That he would reach the shore before the yacht could overhaul him, all in the skiff were assured, for safety was near at hand.

But suddenly, with a snap, like the crack of a rifle, one of the oars parted, and Snow was thrown backward in the skiff, which was now almost helpless upon the waters of the river.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SWIM FOR LIFE.

"GEMMANS, we has got to swim!"

The remark was made by the black sailor as soon as he scrambled up from the bottom of the skiff, where he had fallen when the oar broke.

"Swim? Why, man, we are ironed!" cried the Sea Owl.

"I knows dat, massa; but you had better swim dan let dem pirates git you."

"But how can we swim with these irons on?"

"I helps you, gemmans, and yonder comes de smack, mighty close."

"Release us first!"

"No, sah! you goes in swimmin' wid yer irons on."

"Come, Drew, it is hanging if caught by those fellows, for you know their threats against us," said the Sea Owl.

"And it is drowning to jump overboard," responded Drew.

"The easier death, at any rate. Come!"

With this Dan Brett sprang into the river, followed instantly by Snow and Drew.

They had hardly touched the water when Snow grasped each one of them firmly by the shoulder and said:

"Dibe deep and swim wid me, gemmans!"

Mechanically they obeyed, and they seemed to be a long while under the water.

But, at last, they arose, much nearer the shore, and found that the skiff had been run down by the smack, which had at once gone about and was looking for them.

But, upheld by the negro, who appeared to swim like a fish, they were urged shoreward, for, unaided, they could have done but little to save themselves, and they were glad to see that the crew of the smack were at fault.

"Dibe again, gemmans!" ordered Snow, in a low tone, as the yacht suddenly headed toward them.

Once more they disappeared beneath the surface.

Finding that Drew was struggling, as though drowning, Snow hastily rose, and they came up directly astern of the smack and heard the words:

"Curse them, they are drowned!"

"Not yit, massa," muttered the negro, and he supported Drew the more, for that officer seemed not as good in the water as was Dan Brett and the black sailor.

"Make for the shore, for I am no water-dog to stand this, spluttered Drew.

"Oll right, sah! I tink dey hab gib us up, now," and with a power and skill that were remarkable, the negro swam shoreward, almost carrying the whole weight of Drew, while he also aided the Sea Owl, though the latter did all that he could to assist with his ironed hands and feet.

It was certain that the smack had given them up as drowned, for it headed down the harbor; and it looked as though they might drown, as the shore was yet some distance off.

"Will you not release me of my irons, man, and then I can aid you with my comrade?" said Dan Brett.

"Massa, if I had de keys I would do so, but dey is on de bunch I flung de smugglers."

"Too true; I had forgotten that."

"I would hab let you go free, sah, afore we jumped overboard, had I had de keys, sah. But I guesses we are all right," said the plucky negro.

"I hope so, though it is a desperate struggle for you, as, hampered as I am, I can do little, and poor Drew is utterly tired out."

"Gone up for sure, Dan; but don't mind me, and swim ashore yourselves, for you two can reach it," was the reply.

"Come, Drew, you should know me better than that," answered the Sea Owl, making desperate efforts to struggle on.

"De gemman know me better when I gits him on shore," was Snow's response.

"And you think he'll have the opportunity?" asked the Sea Owl, with one of his light, reckless laughs.

"Yes, sah, for I hain't gi'n out yit. Now you bofe jist grip me onto de shoulders and I git you on de beach soon."

Following this advice, the two men grasped firmly, each upon one broad shoulder of the brave black, and then with powerful strokes, he made for the shore, those whose lives he was saving aiding all in their power.

At last the feet of the black sailor touched the bottom, and the next moment the three men staggered out of the water, all of them pretty well used up.

Throwing themselves down upon the bank, they sought rest for awhile, and gazing down the harbor could just dimly see the smack making all speed toward the open sea.

"She has escaped us, Drew," said the Sea Owl.

"Yes, sir."

"And now, my man, what is the next move?" and the Sea Owl peered closely into the face of the negro, who answered:

"Does you see dem lights up de shore, massa?"

"Yes."

"Dem is at de Jersey ferry."

"I know that."

"Well, sah, you kin make your way up dar, and get 'em to put you ober de ribber into de city if you wants to go dat way."

"Yes, we wish to go over to New York, but would rather have you look up a boatsomewhere and row us across."

"No, massa."

"Why not?"

"In de fu'st place, I hain't gwine to steal no boat."

"I will see that it is returned, so that you cannot be accused of stealing."

"No, sah, for if I goes wid you dat way, you kin git to de city in time to get a war-vessel and start arter de smack, and I don't want 'em caught."

"Ah, I see."

"Yas, sah, and I is jist a leetle afraid dat you might hold on to me."

"No, sah, you kin walk up to de ferry, and dey will put you ober, and by dat time de smack will hab run clean out ob sight."

"And you?"

"I will take good keer, sah, to look arter myself, and I is gwine to start about it now."

"Then you will not go with us? I will give you work to do, my man, and pardon your game on us to-night."

"Tankee, sah, but I guesses I'll hab to decline."

"Good-night, gemmans!"

With this remark, Snow handed over the weapons he had taken from the two men, and, to their utter amazement, walked coolly into the river and swam away.

They watched him until he merged into darkness, and then bent their steps toward the ferry.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SEA OWL'S DISCOVERY.

LIEUTENANT BURR MABREY was always a favorite with Captain Ferncliffe, who knew the young officer to be brave as a lion, a perfect seaman, devoted to his duties, and possessed of a noble heart.

Besides, Burr Mabrey came of a good family, and was by no means a poor man, so that Captain Ferncliffe could not but think he would make a good husband for Stella, when that young lady should get old enough to think about matrimony.

After the departure of the prisoners with the Sea Owl, he was anxious to have the lieutenant remain and spend the evening with them, and so urged it that Burr Mabrey could not decline, especially when the invitation was warmly seconded by Stella.

Remembering that another of his favorites, Midshipman Peyton Manning, was on board the yacht, Captain Ferncliffe said:

"I will send Felix after Manning, too, Mabrey, for the yacht will be all right if there is not an officer on board, and the men shall have a feast."

"Let me send Felix at once, father, for Mr. Manning, and I will tell Gibson to prepare food for the yacht's crew," said Stella, anxious to escape for a while from the parlor.

Her first duty was to order Gibson, the butler, to prepare a repast for the crew of the yacht, with wine, in the servants' hall, and then to send Felix after the middy.

Having done this she sought the piazza, to find that Snow was not there.

"Snow!"

She dared not call his name so as to be heard by those in the parlor.

"Snow!"

Still no answer.

"Can he have deserted me?" she asked herself.

Again she called, and this time in a loud, clear voice:

"Snow!"

No answer came from the negro, but the captain came hastily out.

"It is you, Stella?"

"Yes, father, I was calling that poor negro, for it would not do to neglect him."

"True, my child, and I had forgotten him."

"I told him to remain here, sir, for—"

"Yes, I wanted to see him, and have been most thoughtless."

"I hope he has not gone."

"I fear he has, sir."

"Perhaps he is at the servants' quarters?"

"No, sir, for I just came from there."

"Well, I will have him looked up to-morrow, and reward him most liberally, as he deserves; but come in, Stella, for the night air is chilly."

Greatly disappointed at the apparent desertion by Snow, Stella followed her father into the house, where they were soon after joined by the handsome young middy, who, youth-like, was already over head and ears in love with his commander's daughter.

Gibson had prepared a most tempting supper for them, and they sat down to its enjoyment with right good will, if I except Stella, who seemed slightly *distract* in manner; but then, her thoughts were upon the friends of her childhood, the smuggler crew, whom she feared were destined to end their lives ingloriously, as of late the smugglers had been classed as pirates.

With rare old wine to wash down the edibles, the party sat long at the table, while Gibson was busy without, giving the men the best the mansion's larder could supply.

Adjourning to the library, at the request of her father, Stella took up her guitar, a present from her young smuggler lover, Hugh Talbot, and sung for them some of the weird, wild ballads of the people among whom she had been brought up.

Charmed with her voice all listened, fearing she would break the spell upon them, and, seeming to find more pleasure in singing than in talking, the maiden caroled forth song after song until the great clock in the hall chimed forth the hour of midnight.

Instantly the lieutenant and middy arose to take their departure.

"Better stay here, gentlemen, for we have plenty of space in this old mansion," said the captain.

But they declined, and the lieutenant said:

"I will select you a crew for the yacht, Captain Ferncliffe, as you have purchased her, and send them up in the morning to relieve the men I leave on board to-night."

"Do so, Mabrey, and the yacht will then serve as a guard for the mansion in these troublous times— Ah! who can that be?"

Steps were heard upon the piazza, and stepping to the door Captain Ferncliffe saw before him Dan Brett, the Sea Owl, and his companion.

"Gentlemen, walk in," he said, quickly.

"We are hardly fit objects for a gentleman's library, Captain Ferncliffe, as you can see," said the Sea Owl.

All eyes were turned upon them as they entered, and it required but a glance to see that they had been overboard in their clothing, that they were hatless, and their wrists were heavily ironed.

"Great God, Brett! what does this mean, sir?" cried Captain Ferncliffe.

"I can tell you in a few words, sir."

"It means that the Sea Owl has met his match, ay, more than his match, and in a crow, too," and Dan Brett smiled pleasantly.

"I certainly am at a loss to comprehend, sir."

"Well, Captain Ferncliffe, may I ask if you sent that black sailor to say that you needed your men, and that he must aid us in running the smack around to the prison ship?"

"I did not, sir."

"Then the black rascal played a bold, and devilishly—I beg pardon, lady—fine game upon us."

"Explain, please, Mr. Brett."

"He boarded the smack—"

"The negro?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, I see."

"And said that you had sent him, as I just remarked."

"I let the crew go, and together we got up the anchor, and I allowed him to take the helm."

"He held on over toward the Jersey shore, and then called me quickly to go into the cabin, where I had ordered the prisoners, as they were up to mischief, and as soon as my back was to him he seized me, and I was quickly bound."

"Impossible!" cried Captain Ferncliffe, while Stella uttered an exclamation of seeming alarm.

"I am considered a powerful man, Captain Ferncliffe, but that negro handled me easily, and turued me over to the prisoners to tie, while he coolly went on deck and served Drew as he had me."

"But, to shorten my story, he kept the pirates from killing us, and, hauling his skiff alongside, after putting these irons, which he took from Drew's pockets, upon us, he then ordered us into his boat."

"This is most amazing news, Mr. Brett," said Captain Ferncliffe.

"It seems hard to believe it of that brave negro," remarked Lieutenant Mabrey.

"Perhaps he had some good motive," suggested Stella, quietly, yet with great anxiety to hear the rest of the story.

"He had a motive, Miss Ferncliffe, yet I can not see that it was a good one.

"He set those pirates free, and yet they seemed as amazed to be rescued by him as we were to have him seize us."

"You do not think they knew him, then?"

"I am sure that they did not, Captain Ferncliffe."

"Strange, and yet he aided their escape, for it seems they did escape?"

"Most surely, sir, and are now out at sea, or in some safe hiding-place, for we lost sight of the smack two hours and more ago, heading seaward under full sail."

"This is most provoking, and yet I cannot see how you can be blamed, Mr. Brett."

"Only in having trusted the negro, sir."

"But then he had rescued Miss Ferncliffe from these very men this afternoon, as I understood it, and I saw him here at your house, so, naturally, when he came after me with a message from you, especially one I had no reason to doubt the truth of, I could not but believe him."

"I should have done the same, sir."

"But I, who have been a smuggling detective for years, should have known better; but both Drew and myself were taken in by him most cleverly, and lost our smack and his pirate crew for being such fools."

"But where is the negro now?"

"To tell you the story, sir, he was following us out of the cabin of the smack, when the pirates rushed upon him, but he brought them to a standstill very quickly with his pistol, and coolly came on deck and aided us into his skiff."

"Then he called out to the smuggler leader to take the keys of the irons, and he tossed the bunch into the cockpit, seized his oars and rowed down the river."

"But the pirates seemed anxious to capture us, and the two first men free of their irons got the smack started in chase, and soon she came bowling along before a breeze that was all in her favor and constantly increasing."

"And the skiff?"

"Was sent through the water at a pace which I did not believe it in the power of mortal man to force a boat."

"You still in irons?"

"Yes, sir, for the negro would not release us."

"He could not, as we afterward found out, for the keys of our irons were on the bunch he threw upon the smack," said Drew.

"And more, he did not wish to give us a fair chance with him, as he frankly confessed," continued the Sea Owl.

"But the river was rough, and one wave hit us hard, and the result was the starboard oar snapped off short."

"Ah! that was bad."

"Indeed it was, and the negro made us leap into the water, while he held us up."

"You should have remained with the boat."

"No, Captain Ferncliffe, for the smugglers of New York waters have a standing reward for my head, and have threatened to hang me if they catch me."

"Hence, I preferred drowning, and in that way escaped death, for the negro dragged us both down into the depths of the river, and swam shoreward with us."

"When we arose we found the skiff had been run down by the smack, which put about in search of us."

"But how could you swim, gentlemen, in irons as you are?"

"That puzzled us, sir, and though Drew gave out, the negro got to the shore in some way, and I will say, I never saw a man who was his equal in the water."

"Well, I cannot account for all this, for this very afternoon he saved my daughter from the very men whom he rescued from you."

"True, Captain Ferncliffe, and as I said, seemed wholly unknown to them, while he would not permit them to harm Drew and I, whom he certainly owes no favors, of any kind."

"Where did you leave him?"

"He left us," after telling us where to find the ferry across to the city, as though we did not know, and then coolly walked into the river, and swam off out of sight."

"Swam off?" cried both Captain Ferncliffe and Stella in a breath.

"Fact, sir, and when we lost sight of him he was heading down the harbor, as though he intended to swim across the ocean, and if he could store away provisions enough to last him, I believe he could do it, from what I saw of his performances in the water."

Captain Ferncliffe and his officers smiled at the Sea Owl's belief in Snow's swimming powers, while the former said:

"Still I shall search for him upon this side of the Atlantic."

"And so will I, sir; but I came first here to inform you of how we lost the smack, for I saw as we crossed the ferry, that you had not retired; but, Captain Ferncliffe, I made one discovery, sir, about the negro."

"And what was that, Mr. Brett?"

"That he was not a negro, but a white man!" was the startling response.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT MIDSHPMAN MANNING SAW.

IT is said, when the tender passion of love attacks a youth, or one who has not stepped across the threshold of the score and one years that the law sets as the age one of the *genus homo* must reach to become a man, that it is more violent in its throbs than when one of riper years feels Cupid's darts.

Be this as it may, it is certain that Peyton Manning, the young midshipman of the lost schooner-of-war *Crocodile*, had a very serious attack of heart disease from his first meeting with Stella, when he saw her in the little village as the Daughter of Neptune.

Her bravery in coming out to the wreck, alone in her surf-skiff, and afterward her beauty, wholly won his heart, which each after-meeting with her in her elegant city home but served to add to in intensity.

After leaving the mansion, in company with Lieutenant Mabrey and the two revenue officers, Peyton Manning heard little of their conversation as they walked along together, and in parting company, when Brett and Drew turned into Ann street to seek their home, he hardly bade them good-night.

Walking on down Fulton street, the two officers sought their quarters, which were near the river, and the lieutenant sought his much-needed rest.

But the midshipman, with Stella before his eyes, sat down by the open window to gaze out upon the river and meditate.

The distant lights in Brooklyn first caught his eye, and then here and there the glimmer from a vessel anchored out in the river.

Then his gaze fell upon the street lamps along the New York shore, and then rested absently upon a trim little sloop that was anchored off in the stream.

As he looked he saw a dark form come down the street, and at a quick pace approach the shore.

The street-lamp, dim as was its light, for they burned oil in those days, showed him a tall, sinewy form, and that the face was black.

This seemed to awaken the midshipman from his delicious love reverie, and he gazed most intently upon the man.

Watching, he saw him approach the river-bank, and then turn and gaze around him, as though to see if he was watched.

Apparently satisfied that no eye was upon him, he slipped in the water with a light splash and disappeared.

Quickly the midshipman arose and seized from a table a night-glass, which he at once leveled upon the trim little craft which had before caught his eye, while he muttered:

"He is either swimming out to that craft, or intending to cross the river."

"I will soon know."

He had not long to wait, for, with his glasses fixed upon the little sloop, he soon saw the dripping form rise out of the water and draw himself up on the deck.

Shaking the water from him, like a huge Newfoundland dog, the man stood an instant or two, and then entered the little cabin.

"That is his craft, or he means mischief by boarding her," muttered the midshipman.

Then he added:

"I will soon know, for if the latter he will soon come out."

But the moments passed by and the man did not reappear, so Midshipman Peyton Manning determined to act.

Putting on his heavy coat, and arming himself, he quietly left his room and the house without disturbing Lieutenant Mabrey, and hastened up the river street toward the yard where the *Spiteful* was being built, and where he knew the crew of Captain Ferncliffe had their quarters.

To arouse a coxswain and four men was but a few moments' work, and ordering them into a small boat they pulled rapidly down the stream.

Right for the little sloop he headed, and laying the boat skillfully alongside he sprung on deck, his sword in hand.

There was a light in the cabin, and the companionway was open; but before the midshipman could enter a man stepped into the glare of the lamp, and said, sternly:

"Well, sir, what does this mean?"

The man held a pistol in his hand and covered the midshipman, who had only his sword drawn, yet answered boldly:

"It means, sir, that I seize this vessel in the name of the Government."

"For what reason, may I ask, sir?"

"I shall explain my reason when I have searched her, and I warn you to offer no resistance, sir."

"I shall offer no resistance, sir, to an officer of the navy, as I see by your dress that you are; but I was prepared to defend myself had you proven to be otherwise," was the calm reply, and the man returned his pistol to his belt.

"How many are there on board this craft?" asked the midshipman, stepping into the dimly-lighted cabin, while his men crowded close behind him.

"Two besides myself, sir. You see them

there in their bunks, somewhat surprised at your unceremonious entrance," and the man pointed to two heads peering out of as many bunks forward.

"May I ask what your occupation is?"

"That of a coast fisherman, sir," was the polite reply.

"With a little smuggling out of season, just to kill time?"

"As this is out of season, sir, with us, you have but to search my vessel, if you suspect me of being a smuggler."

"May I ask if you are the man who swam out to your smack half an hour ago?"

The man started at this abrupt question and the midshipman saw it; but he answered, quietly:

"I am, sir."

"Where is your boat?"

"She was run down by a vessel, and I had to swim ashore."

"Indeed! And I would like to inquire where are the wet clothes you just pulled off?"

"They lie there, sir," and the man pointed to the pile of clothing in one corner of the cabin.

The midshipman stepped forward and taking them up looked at them curiously a moment, after which he said:

"I recognize them, sir, and know you, although you have removed your wig and washed the black from off your face."

"Indeed, sir, and who am I?" asked the man, who seemed to persistently keep his face shaded from view.

"You are the daring man who so splendidly played the part to-day of the black sailor," and the midshipman tried to get a better look into the face of the man, who remarked, with the utmost sangfroid:

"Admitted, sir, that I did play the part of a negro to-day—what then?"

"Simply that you are my prisoner, sir," and the midshipman raised the point of his sword to a level with the man's heart.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

CAPTAIN FERNCLIFFE went into the breakfast-room at the usual hour the morning after the scenes related as occurring upon the river, and was rather surprised to find Stella awaiting him, for he had expected she would sleep late, and had given orders not to have her called, much as he disliked to miss seeing her before his departure to his vessel.

"Why, Stella, up so early, after your late hours last night?" he said, pleasantly.

"Yes, father, for I would not let you eat breakfast alone, though I do confess to feeling sleepy, but then I have the day before me."

"Well, my child, I will not be anxious about you, now that I have the yacht, and her new crew should soon be here."

"And I am to be captain when you are not on board, father?"

"Yes, and when I am, for certainly you are a most perfect sailor in spite of your years and sex; but there come the men, and I see that Mabrey has sent Midshipman Manning with them."

"Gibson, go out and ask Mr. Manning to join us at breakfast," said Captain Ferncliffe, glancing through the open window, where the midshipman and a number of seamen were visible coming through the grounds.

Gibson soon disappeared, but returned in a short while with the thanks of the midshipman, for he had been to breakfast, and the report that he would put the new crew on the yacht and drill them in their duties on board.

The captain and Stella leisurely continued their breakfast, and then started for a stroll down to the river-bank.

They saw gathered there the group of seamen who had remained on the yacht all night, while the new crew were on board and the midshipman just coming ashore.

Seeing his commander, and the fair being of his adoration, he hastened to meet them, and after their greeting of him, he said:

"Captain Ferncliffe, I have a prisoner for you, sir."

"A prisoner, Manning?"

"Yes, sir, and one that I fear you will condemn me for arresting; but I deemed that it was my duty."

"Who is he, Manning, and where is he?"

"He is there, sir, among that group of seamen on the bank."

"The fact is, Captain Ferncliffe, that I was unable to sleep, after I returned to my quarters last night, and was looking out of my window when I saw a man walk over to the river-bank, and by the light of a lamp I discovered that he was black, and in fact was the mysterious black sailor."

"Ah! this is news."

"I saw him glance about him and then spring into the water, and I felt that he must be swimming for a small sloop lying at anchor off-shore so I seized my glass, and watching beheld him drag himself upon deck and enter the cabin."

"I at once went up to the quarters of the *Crocodile's* men, sir, and taking a coxswain and four men, boarded the little craft to find there three men."

"And the negro, Manning?" quickly asked Captain Ferncliffe.

"He was there, sir, but his face had changed its dark hue for the complexion of a white man."

"As Brett said?"

"Yes, sir; the Sea Owl was right, for the man had been playing negro, that was all."

"And what did you do, Manning?"

"I arrested him, sir, and left the coxswain and his men in charge of the sloop."

"But the light was so dim that I hardly saw his face, and when I rowed out to the craft this morning, I was surprised to find that the man who had so successfully played his part in disguise yesterday was none other than the brave young fisherman who served us so well the night the Crocodile was wrecked."

"What! Hugh Talbot?" cried Stella, in a tone that fairly startled the middy.

"Yes, Miss Ferncliffe, his name is Talbot, and—"

But he paused, as Stella was already running toward the group of men in the midst of which stood the handsome young smuggler.

"Oh, Hugh! I am so glad to see you, but what does all this mean?" she cried, as she grasped his hand.

"I am glad to see you also, Miss Ferncliffe; but what does all that mean, may I ask?" was the somewhat cold response of the young sailor.

"You know well to what I refer; but come, go with me and join my father, and then explain."

She took his arm and led him toward her father and the midshipmen who were approaching, while she called out:

"I have captured your prisoner, Midshipman Manning."

"So I see, Miss Ferncliffe, and I bow to your will," was the reply.

"Well, Talbot, I am glad to see you," said Captain Ferncliffe grasping the hand of the young sailor, who politely saluted, yet remained silent.

"Come, what did you mean by masquerading as a negro yesterday, or is Midshipman Manning mistaken in thinking he has in you the person who served Stella so well yesterday, and afterward spoiled it all by setting free a crew of smugglers, if they are not even worse?"

"Midshipman Manning is not mistaken, Captain Ferncliffe," calmly said Hugh Talbot.

"You are then the black sailor of yesterday?"

"I am, sir."

"May I ask why that masquerading nonsense?"

"I did not consider it nonsense, for, learning of a plot to carry off Miss Ferncliffe, and being known to the parties who intended to kidnap her, I assumed that disguise to be near and protect her."

"Ha! this sounds well, and well did you protect her; but who were these parties?"

"That I cannot tell, sir."

"You cannot, or will not?"

"I will not, sir," was the firm, yet polite reply.

"See here, Talbot, you saved the lives of myself, officers, and half a hundred men, and refused reward for your services."

"I offered you a commission in the navy and you declined that."

"Then you rescued Stella and Lieutenant Mabrey on their way to the city, from some coast pirates, and again placed me under obligation to you."

"Now, for the third time, you serve me in saving my child from kidnappers, and yet allow me to repay you in no way whatever."

"I did but my duty, Captain Ferncliffe, and you owe me only thanks."

"Well, you make me feel that I owe you more, for if I did not so feel, I would force from you who it was that attempted to steal my child from me."

"Captain Ferncliffe, I am not one that can be forced to tell what I have made up my mind to keep secret."

"Well, I will not quarrel with you, Talbot, and I will in part return your kindness by telling you to go now, for I will not hold you prisoner, even though you put two Government officers in irons last night and took from their keeping a crew of pirates, an offense that would cost you your life were it known to those in high authority."

"I do not doubt it, Captain Ferncliffe; but those men had been my comrades, and I would not see them punished when I could save them."

"Your comrades, and smugglers, ay, pirates, Dan Brett said."

"This sounds bad indeed."

"It is nevertheless true, sir, for, be they what they may, I have known them from boyhood."

"Well, I will not insult you, Talbot, by accusing you of being what they are; but I will bid you go, and give you warning not to keep evil associations, if you do not wish to be considered like those who you say are your friends."

"Go, Talbot, and if I can serve you in any way, remember, I will be ever ready to do so."

"I thank you, sir."

"Good-by, Stella," and grasping the hand of the maiden, greatly to the middy's disgust,

Hugh Talbot raised his tarpaulin and walked quickly away, leaving the three gazing after him, with far different feelings in the heart of each.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TWO FOES MEET.

AFTER the bold act of Caspar Knowles to capture Stella, when she left the village on the coast to go to her father, Hugh Talbot became anxious regarding the maiden and determined to watch her closely.

He knew well that both Caspar Knowles and Carter Hayes had sworn that the Daughter of Neptune should never be the bride of other than one of themselves, and their characters were such that they would stop at nothing to carry out any plot for their own success.

Though rivals in love, they had ever been boon companions, and when it came to a decision between them, after they had driven all other suitors from the field, they were determined to leave it to Stella which one of the two she would choose, and the other was to remain content with her choice.

The growing love between the maiden and Hugh Talbot they did not half like, and yet they dared not openly create a breach with their captain, as the laws of their band would not permit it.

Hugh Talbot was under some circumstances their captain, and under others their Fleet Commodore.

The fact is that both Carter Hayes and Caspar Knowles owned their vessels, and were commanders of their smacks with their own crew, and in the smuggling fleet theirs formed two of the five crafts.

The flag-ship was Hugh Talbot's schooner, the Sea Ghost, and then there were two other vessels, all five of them noted for their swift sailing and stanchness.

Under some circumstances all five of the vessels were on duty, for whole cargoes of smuggled goods would at times be unloaded from a vessel some calm day far out at sea, or in some inlet, and be run up to the city by the little fleet.

Then only the Sea Ghost would be called into use, and when on duty Carter Hayes and Caspar Knowles would go as first and second mates under Hugh Talbot.

Hugh Talbot had been always popular with those of the band who did not envy him his good looks, and his daring nature, which had won for him a name as the best seaman of the band, young as he was.

But the clique that followed the lead of Hayes and Knowles were envious of him, and would be glad to see his downfall.

His going boldly to the rescue of the crew of the wrecked Crocodile fanned the spark of ill-will against him into a blaze, and Caspar Knowles had little trouble in urging his crew to go with him to any extremes to outwit Hugh Talbot, while Carter Hayes's men were reporting to him daily, as he lay upon his bed of suffering, just what was being done.

But Hugh Talbot had a spy or two in the enemy's camp, or rather on board the vessel of each one of his rivals, and all their plots were duly reported to him.

Hence it was when he learned of the plan to kidnap Stella, by using the Squire's smack, and with the story that mother Stanford was on board, he had taken the disguise of a negro, and, by shaving off his mustache, cutting his hair short, and with the aid of a woolly wig and black dye, had succeeded in deceiving even Stella as to who he was.

For the sake of the band as well as on account of Stella's wish, he cared not to see Caspar Knowles and his crew suffer punishment, and he therefore boldly rescued them from the clutches of the Sea Owl, though none of them for a moment suspected who it was who had thwarted their kidnapping scheme, and then saved their necks.

Believing that the two revenue officers, bound as they were, had pulled the supposed negro to the bottom with them, the smugglers sailed on rejoicing at their escape, and at the same time bemoaning the failure of their plot, though with a firm determination to try again to carry out their purpose of tearing Stella from her new home.

In the mean time, feeling assured that Caspar Knowles would be up to mischief again, Hugh Talbot had returned to his little smack and intended to set sail with daylight and the outgoing tide, when he unexpectedly received a visit from the love-sick and sleepless young middy.

Once he was free, Hugh Talbot made his way rapidly to his little vessel, and was greeted with pleasure by his two companions on board, who had dreaded the worst for him.

"Get out the mud-hook, lads, and we'll run out of this," he said, cheerily, and three minutes after the little vessel was flying down the harbor of New York, her prow pointed seaward.

Instead, however, of standing directly out to sea, the smack was headed for the picturesque north shore of the Navesink Highlands, and merely grazing a point of land, enabled one of

her crew to spring ashore without checking her way.

"Tell Brunswick to leave for the haven as soon as it is dark, and to run down in all haste," called out Hugh Talbot, as the smack swept on, leaving the man standing on the shore.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the man, and he turned and disappeared in the forest, while the little vessel held on its way directly for the point of Sandy Hook.

Rounding the Hook, with as little space to spare as possible, as though anxious to lose no time, Hugh Talbot jibed his sail to port and went bowling down the coast toward the haven.

It was late in the afternoon when he headed into the Manasquan.

He saw the hamlet back on the distant hills to the right, the little white cross that he had placed above Stella's mother's grave shone brightly in the slanting rays of the declining sun, and the fleet lay at anchor under the lee of a small island, whose tree-clad summit hid them from the view of a vessel passing by at sea.*

His quick eye detected the smacks of Caspar Knowles and Carter Hayes at anchor, but The Squire, the vessel used by the former in his kidnapping scheme, was nowhere visible.

"He has not dared bring her in here, expecting a visit from a Government vessel in search of her," said Hugh.

And he added, as he rounded to:

"But I am certain he will be here, and then I can find out his next little game against Stella."

"And I shall thwart it, too."

Sweeping up to an anchorage, Hugh's shipmate let fall the little anchor, the sails came down on a run, and springing into a skiff buoyed near, the two were soon on shore.

A few of the villagers were on the beach mending their nets, repairing their boats, or idling, and they greeted the young sailor with words of welcome.

"What news, lad?"

"Have you been in with a night cargo, cap'n?"

"Did you see Neptune's Daughter?"

"Has she forgotten her old friends, Hugh?"

"What was Caspar up to in taking the Squire's smack instead of his own?"

"How came he to lose her?"

Such were the questions, asked so rapidly that Hugh had hardly time to reply to any of them; but the one about the smack taken by Caspar Knowles seemed to impress him, for he asked, quickly:

"Did not Caspar return in the Squire's smack?"

"No, she was run down coming out of New York harbor last night."

"Run down?"

"So he said."

"Last night?"

"Yes, and the crew came back in the two skiffs, and got here only an hour or so ago."

Hugh Talbot made no reply but walked on toward the hamlet, his thoughts busy.

He could understand why Caspar Knowles would not care to bring the smack into the haven, to have her found there by any Government vessel that might be sent in search of her; but he could not believe that she had been run down and sunk, and felt that the young skipper was playing some deep game.

"I will see Hawk, and soon know if Caspar Knowles has told the truth," he said, aloud.

"Do you dare accuse Caspar Knowles of telling a lie, Hugh Talbot?"

With the words the form of the young smuggler himself stepped out from behind a scrub cedar and confronted Hugh Talbot.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HUGH TALBOT'S RESOLVE.

HUGH TALBOT would have preferred that his words should have remained unheard by Caspar Knowles, though it was from no fear of him, but rather that he had inadvertently spoken the name of his spy and friend upon the vessel of his foe.

Having said what he had, he determined to stand by his word, and, in answer to the question if he dared to accuse Caspar Knowles of telling a lie, he answered frankly:

"I know you have lied, Caspar Knowles, in many cases where a lie was by no means necessary."

"You stand behind your rank as fleet commodore to say this?"

"I do not, sir, for I shall dismiss you from the fleet as one wholly unworthy to remain in it, after your dastardly attack upon the yacht and her crew, sent after Neptune's Daughter."

"You will dismiss me?" sneered Caspar Knowles.

"Yes."

"You seem to forget that it requires a majority of the fleet captains to dismiss me, and that you can only bring charges against me."

"I forget nothing, sir; and you will see that

* At the time of which I write the Manasquan river had a far better depth of water than now. In fact the nature of the coast there has greatly changed since then.—THE AUTHOR.

a majority rule against you, for you have no vote."

"And, if dismissed, I will be my own master, and hence your equal!"

"You may be the former, but never the latter, for smuggler though I am, I have honor, which you are wholly devoid of," was the stinging reply.

"Well, as my own master, I can hold you responsible for your words!"

"Certainly, if you so wish."

"And I will reap a rich revenge for your daring to take from me my prize."

"What prize?"

"The yacht."

"See here, Caspar Knowles, we are smugglers, not pirates, and such acts as yours would soon bring the forces of the Government upon us."

"We break the laws in running in smuggled goods, and that is bad enough; but we are not cut-throats and sea-robbers, as you will find out."

"You are getting strangely good all of a sudden, Hugh Talbot."

"I am awaking to a sense of what right and wrong is toward one's fellow-man; but I am not on trial, Caspar Knowles, and you are, so report to-night to the cabin of the Squire, and I will summon the other captains to meet you there."

"Why not wait until Carter Hayes is able to attend?" asked Knowles, anxious to gain time.

"It will be too long to wait, and as you seem given to acts of lawlessness of late, I intend you shall not perpetrate them under the flag of our little fleet."

"I will expect you then, sir," and Hugh Talbot passed on, leaving his enemy gazing after him with a look of intense hatred, while his lips uttered the words:

"You may set me adrift, Hugh Talbot, but I will not strand; but for me to float, you must sink, and I'll see to it that you do."

Going on up to the hamlet on the hillside, Hugh Talbot stopped at the door of Carter Hayes.

It was open, and the young skipper was bolstered up in an easy-chair, but looking very white and wan.

"Well, Carter, how are you, lad?" asked Hugh, kindly, as he approached.

"I am getting better daily, Hugh Talbot," was the low reply, with a frown.

"Here, Carter, are some little delicacies I purchased for you in the city, thinking they might taste nice," and Hugh opened a small basket and laid out some fruit, jellies and other nice things.

"I do not wish them, Hugh Talbot."

"Come, Carter, don't spite yourself by your hatred of me, for these will do you good, and make you stronger, so that you can sooner get your revenge which you threaten me with."

"They may be poisoned," was the sinister reply.

Hugh Talbot's face flushed, but checking his anger he said:

"No, lad, I am no assassin to strike at a man's back."

"They will not harm you, I'll warrant, so eat them, do, if you kill me as soon as you are well."

"Now tell me, are you able to attend a meeting to-night to try Caspar Knowles?"

"No, I cannot leave here, as you see; but what has poor Caspar done?"

"Enough to warrant his dismissal as a fleet skipper."

"There are enough to try him without me."

"Yes, and to dismiss him, too."

"Good-by, lad, and I hope you will soon get to be yourself again."

"It will be a sad day for you when I am, Hugh Talbot."

"Bah! don't threaten like a sick child, but await your recovery and then act like a man," and with this retort Hugh Talbot went on through the hamlet, greeted everywhere with kindly welcomes from men, women and children, while innumerable inquiries were put to him as to whether he had seen the Daughter of Neptune.

"Yes, I saw her this morning," he said to a girl up who had gathered around him.

"Where was she?"

"At her home."

"Were you allowed to go there, lad?" asked an old woman.

"Oh yes, I was escorted there by a naval officer," returned Hugh, with a smile at the remembrance of his arrest by the midshipman.

"And she spoke to you?"

"Yes, indeed."

"God bless her, then she has not forgotten the old friends in meeting the new."

"No, indeed, for Stella is the same in silks and satins as she was in homespun," said Hugh, with enthusiasm.

Going to the cabins of the skippers of the little smuggling fleet, he ordered them to appear at the Squire's that evening, and then passed on to the home of that dignitary, where innumerable questions were asked about Stella, for the old man and his wife sadly missed the young girl who had been so dear to them, and the gold

which Captain Ferncliffe had forced upon them did not repay them for their loss.

After leaving the Squire's, Hugh passed on to his own home, and received the warm greeting of his parents, who, knowing of his arrival, were waiting supper for him.

"Better give the girl up now, Hugh," said his mother.

"Yes, boy, she will soon forget you along with the rest of us," added his father.

"I do not intend to give her up, mother, and, father, Stella Ferncliffe will not forget us," was the firm reply.

"Then, lad, you lay out for yourself a life of misery in the future, for the girl will laugh at Hugh Talbot, the fisher-lad, the smuggler, before she has been a month longer in her luxurious home."

"Father, you little know Stella, if you say that, for she is as true as steel, and riches and society will not destroy her nature."

"She may laugh at the fisher-lad, but she will not at what I shall make myself, for I am determined to cast off these lawless chains I wear and become worthy of the true little woman I love."

"Boy, you are mad," cried Admiral Talbot, savagely.

"Oh, no, sir, I have been mad, but I am not, now."

"Great God! do you forget your oath, boy?" cried the admiral.

"No, sir, nor shall I break it; but the time of my days of slavery are nearly gone by, and then I shall be a man to act for myself," and, rising from the table, Hugh Talbot left the cabin, while his father said, in a whisper:

"Wife, the whispers that the boy is a traitor will yet break out openly, and he will be condemned to die by his own people."

"God forbid," groaned mother Talbot, as she sunk back in her chair and covered her face in her hands.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE TRIAL AND THE THREAT.

The laws that governed the so-called band of fishermen were severe in the extreme, and the breakers of them were punished without mercy.

Though the whole band were at heart smugglers, there were, in reality, not half a hundred men who were the real sinners in act.

These half hundred so pledged themselves that they were to suffer the penalties and dare the dangers of their lawless acts, protecting the rest of the hamlet from censure, should they be dogged to their doors by the officers of the law.

They had the name, with the remainder of the men, old and young, from the hamlet, of being coast fishermen; but these picked ones were constantly at work in their little vessels, carrying smuggled goods to the city for disposal.

The smuggler fleet was, as I have before stated, composed of five vessels, all of them swift sailers, as the reader may judge by the manner in which Caspar Knowles's smack overhauled the yacht.

The flag-ship was the Sea Ghost, which has already come under the reader's notice, and so great was her speed, and so cleverly was she handled, and so numerous were her escapes under her daring young skipper, Hugh Talbot, that she was looked upon by the superstitious seamen as a myth, and officers of the law despaired of her capture.

Now and then the little fleet, consisting of the Sea Ghost, Yellow Jacket, Blue Wing, Shadow and Will-o'-the-wisp, would fly out to sea some calm night, receive the cargo of a vessel with goods to smuggle in, and then, disguised as fishing-craft, would run up to the city and get rid of their lawless freight almost under the very eyes of the revenue officials, escaping to their lairs again to await another chance to repeat their daring act.

These cargoes had greatly enriched the denizens of the fishing-hamlet, each family having laid away a goodly little pile of gold to draw on should a rainy day come.

To hold this band together it was therefore very necessary that they should be governed by most stringent laws, and that those who broke them should be severely dealt with.

It was with no feeling of revenge against Caspar Knowles that Hugh Talbot determined to report him before the skippers of the smuggler fleet for trial, but because he feared that, armed as he was with a swift-sailing vessel, he might be tempted to carry off Stella, while, deprived of his power, he would not be able to do so.

At the appointed time the four captains arrived at the cabin of Squire Stanford, who was the judge on such occasions.

Caspar Knowles was a trifle ill at ease, for he knew not what would be his fate, and he expected little mercy from Hugh Talbot and his two other fellow-skippers.

"Why is this meeting called?" asked the Squire, when the four were seated.

Hugh Talbot arose and responded:

"I desire to make charges against our fellow-skipper, Captain Caspar Knowles."

"You are his accuser?"

"I am."

"Of what is he accused?"

"First, he laid in wait with his vessel and crew for the yacht of Captain Ferncliffe, which was sent here after the Daughter of Neptune."

"For what purpose did he do this?"

"Let my shipmates and yourself judge, when I tell you that he pursued the yacht out to sea, boarded her, killed all of her crew, excepting her commander, Lieutenant Burr Mabrey, and had her as a prize when I took her from him."

"This is an astounding charge, Commodore Talbot, and I feel that, in making it, you are aware of the punishment you suffer, if your words prove untrue."

"Death by hanging is the punishment for speaking falsely of a messmate in our band," was the cool reply.

"Right; now shall I submit this charge to your shipmates?"

"No, Squire, for I also charge that Caspar Knowles secretly received a smuggled cargo, and running into Spuyten Duyvel creek, in your vessel, which he borrowed of you, pretending his own leaked, he sold the goods to his own interests."

"Again, that in your vessel he anchored off the home of Captain Ferncliffe, and sent two of his crew, Lucas King and Cain, ashore in a boat, with a falsehood to the Daughter of Neptune, that Mother Stanford was on board and wished to see her."

"Deceived by their words, Stella Ferncliffe entered their boat and was rowing out to the smack when rescued by a negro man who suspected treachery."

"Not wishing to hold her old friends, Stella set them free, and finding that an alarm had been spread, she bribed the negro who had come to her rescue to say that those on the smack were not the guilty ones."

"At her request they were released, but were re-arrested by the revenue officer we know as Sea Owl, and the charge against them was smuggling and piracy."

"Again were Caspar Knowles and his crew released by the negro, sent by Stella Ferncliffe, and they set sail for the haven, arriving in their skiffs, and reporting falsely that their smack had been run down last night in the harbor."

"And was not such the case?"

"No, Squire, for they had sold her to the skipper of a small packet bound to Providence, whose vessel was run into and badly damaged."

"Sending his craft back to the city disabled, the skipper bought the smack, transferred his passengers to her and went on his way, while Caspar Knowles and his men came down to the haven in their boats."

"These are the charges that I make against my shipmate, Caspar Knowles."

So saying Hugh Talbot took his seat, and all eyes turned upon the accused, as the Squire said:

"Stand up, Caspar Knowles!"

He arose and waited in silence.

"You have heard these charges?"

"Yes."

"You know if you deny them and they are proved true that your fate will be—"

"Death! Yes, I know it."

"Well, what do you say, sir; are you guilty, or not guilty?"

A moment of deathlike silence followed, and then came the words:

"I am guilty, and ask mercy of him who shall pass my sentence."

It remained for the Squire to select the one who should pass sentence, for he had not such power himself, and he said promptly:

"As you confess your guilt, it is unnecessary to ask your fellow-skippers as to whether you shall be dismissed from the fleet as a captain, or even as a common sailor in it, so I select Hugh Talbot to pass sentence upon you."

"I care not to be hard upon one upon whom I have looked in the past as my friend," said Hugh Talbot, calmly, and his words gave the accused hope, for he feared that his foe, actuated by hatred, would pass some fearful sentence upon him.

Eagerly therefore he looked at Hugh Talbot and awaited his further words.

"And what is your sentence, sir?" asked the Squire.

"Simply that Caspar Knowles and his crew be dismissed from the fleet, forfeit their vessel to the captain and men who will take their place, and be not allowed to leave the haven and its adjacent waters for the term of six months, under penalty of death."

"This is a very mild sentence," said the Squire, while Caspar Knowles drew a breath of relief.

"Yes, he deserves far worse," said one of the captains.

"Even death, as his acts will bring the brand of piracy upon us," said the other.

But the sentence was passed, and more could not be said, so the trial was at an end.

"One moment, Hugh Talbot," said Caspar Knowles, as the young sailor passed him on his way to his own cabin.

"Well, Caspar?"

"You did wrong in not passing the death sentence upon me."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, for I hate you, and I will yet kill you."

"A threatened man lives to a ripe old age, Caspar Knowles," was Hugh Talbot's remark as he walked on his way.

But he did not forget the threat of his foe.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MEETING IN THE ARBOR.

SEVERAL weeks passed away after the trial and disgrace of Caspar Knowles, and in that time no scene of excitement occurred in the fishing-hamlet.

The ex-skipper went about his duties quietly, devoting himself to fishing by day, and, with the choice comrade of his crew, passing the nights until a late hour in gambling and carousing.

He was not shunned by the others of the hamlet, nor was he liked, for the story of his wrongdoing was known to all, and he was feared as a man who might make trouble.

One night Hugh Talbot had gone out with his little fleet and received a rich cargo, but in running in their vessels had been sighted by a man-of-war and chased.

The Shadow was in great danger of being overhauled and captured, when Hugh Talbot boldly ran down to her rescue in the Sea Ghost, and drawing the fire of the cruiser upon his own vessel, had thus allowed the little smack to escape, though he well-nigh lost his own craft in doing so.

Of course this act of self-sacrifice and daring won for the young smuggler commodore high praise among his people, especially when it was known that Hugh was saving from capture none other than Carter Hayes, for he had so far recovered as to be able to command his vessel.

But still there were unpleasant rumors flying about the haven all the time about Hugh Talbot's not being true as he might, and allowing his love for Stella to make a fool of him.

"Why, he'd sell us all out to gain favor in the eyes of Captain Ferncliffe," Carter Hayes had boldly said, the very day following his escape from capture by the daring of Hugh Talbot.

"Yes, I am but a common seaman, or I might make charges against him that would end his career," hinted Caspar Knowles; but he would say no more, though urged to do so.

Having recovered from his wound, so far as to feel no effects from it, Carter Hayes determined to make an effort to see Stella, again tell her of his love for her, and beg her to be his bride.

If she refused, then he would force her into a marriage with him, feeling assured that once she was his wife, she would be content to come back to the haven and dwell, for the young smuggler was little versed in the nature of a woman.

Fitting his smack up thoroughly, and donning his best sailor suit, he ordered on board his crew of ten men, and one dark night quietly slipped out of the river, not caring to be seen depart by Hugh Talbot, who he was afraid might follow him.

Arriving in the Hudson just after dawn, Carter Hayes dropped anchor a mile above the mansion of Captain Ferncliffe, and going on shore, set forth on foot down the river road.

He soon came to the massive gateway leading into the grounds, and just then a carriage rolled out with an officer in it, who, he knew, must be Captain Ferncliffe, so he felt emboldened by this, and boldly entered the gate.

He found himself within an Eden of beauty, for velvet lawns, white pebble walks, ornamental shrubbery, parterres of flowers, fountains, arbors and statuary were upon every side of him, with the white walls of the mansion rising grandly above the tree-tops, a few hundred paces distant.

"This, then, is the scene to which she has come, is it?"

"Well, she has not enjoyed luxury so long but that she will be willing to give it all up for love," he muttered, as he slowly walked toward the mansion.

Ere he reached the broad steps he cast his eyes to the left, where the velvety lawn sloped down to the river, and caught sight of the very one whom he had come to see.

It was Stella, with a snowy dress and sun-hat on, walking toward a little arbor.

Quickly he turned into another path and hastened toward her.

Discarding the gravel walk he crossed the grass, which gave back no sound to his steps, and he stood gazing upon her, as she sat in the arbor, wholly unconscious of his presence.

"Stella!"

He uttered her name after he had feasted himself upon her beauty.

She sprang to her feet and faced him.

"What! Carter Hayes, you here?" she cried.

"Yes, I am here, and you treat me coldly, though I have just risen from a bed of anguish that well-nigh proved my death," he said, bitterly.

"You brought your suffering upon yourself, Carter; but I heard of your being in a fair way to recover, and am glad to see you well again."

"Is this all, Stella?"

"What more can I say, Carter?"

"I have come here to see you."

"I am sorry that you have done so."

"What?"

"I am sorry that you are here."

"You once treated me kindly, Stella."

"So I did your dog, Fido."

"You compare me to my dog?"

"You both held about the same place in my regard, Carter, for you would never let any one like you, with your temper, your conceit, and—"

"And what else?" he sneered.

"And your jealousy whenever any one spoke to me, although you had no claim upon me."

"I held the claim of love."

"My dear Carter, don't deceive yourself that your vanity would ever allow you to love other than yourself."

"You are laughing at me, Stella Stanford."

"No, I never laugh at one I pity."

"Stella, you have taken on fine airs since you became a lady; but I will have none of them."

"I love you, and I wish you to become my wife, and I will make you happy."

"God save me from such happiness."

"Oh, you will pine for a few days after leaving this gilded cage; but then it will become as a dream to you, and you will be happy in the old home, and my mother will be to you a mother."

"Forgive me if I pain you, Carter Hayes; but I tell you frankly, your mother is the only woman I ever felt hatred for, and that feeling is as deep in my heart against her as is my utter contempt for you."

The eyes now flashed, the slender form was drawn up to its full height, and the lips of the girl curled with scorn as she spoke the scathing words.

The intense vanity of the young smuggler which never before allowed anything to put it down, now felt a rebuff that cut him to the quick, for the one he believed he could make his wife, and awe into becoming such, scorned him.

"Stella Stanford, you—"

"My name is Miss Ferncliffe, sir!" she said, haughtily.

"Curse your fine name, and curse you, too, girl, with my whole heart!"

"You have cast aside my love and thrown down the gauntlet of hatred, and I tell you that I shall take it up with a vengeance, and you shall sue—"

"Begone, sir, or I will call yonder yacht's crew to my aid, and once you are in their grasp the rope around your neck will quickly follow."

She pointed to the yacht, which lay just off the shore, and which some foliage had hidden from him before, and he dared not cause her to carry out her threat, so he said, hastily:

"I mean you no harm, girl, but I repeat that, in casting aside my love, you win my hatred."

"I would rather have your hatred than your love, Carter Hayes, I frankly confess to you."

"Now, leave me, and if you again step foot upon these grounds you shall rue it, for though there are many at the dear old haven that I love and would protect, there are others there, such as you, that it would be better for all were you out of the way, even if you had to go by the yard-arm!"

He quivered at her words and became livid, while he thrust his hand into his bosom, where Stella knew that it grasped a knife-hilt.

But she was defiant as brave, and boldly said: "I dare you to draw that weapon from your bosom, Carter Hayes!"

Her fearless words cowed him, and with an oath through his shut teeth he turned and walked away.

But ere he left the grounds he turned, and, shaking his fist toward the arbor, muttered, in a savage tone:

"This night, my proud beauty, I will make you plead to me for mercy!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SCENE ON THE RIVER WALK.

STELLA FERNCIFFE was beginning to feel that in spite of her beautiful home, a devoted father, loving friends, and riches at her command, her lot was not exactly a happy one, with the continual danger that threatened her from those of the band who were determined to make her suffer.

She was no coward, and yet it was a disagreeable feeling to have hanging over her that any day or night Caspar Knowles or Carter Hayes might pounce upon her and take her from her home.

Yet she would not tell her father of her fears, knowing full well that he would make the first cruise of the Spiteful which was about completed, one of war against the haven.

For the sake of the few guilty ones she did not wish to punish the innocent.

She had heard no more of Caspar Knowles, and hoped that his good feelings had gotten the better of his evil heart, and caused him to let her alone, after she had done what she could to save him and his crew.

Nor had she heard of Hugh Talbot, though she had longed to hear some word of him.

The bold visit of Carter Hayes troubled her more than she wished to acknowledge, for she

knew well his revengeful nature, and that his mother had never liked her because she did not prefer her son to Hugh Talbot, while at heart she was a woman to be governed wholly by her passions and one to be feared.

Shortly after the departure of Carter Hayes, Stella saw the carriage drive back into the yard, and that there were occupants in it she could easily see.

Hastening to the house she was greeted by Midshipman Manning, who at once presented to her a lovely young girl as his sister Nellie.

"My sister gave me a surprise visit this morning, Miss Ferncliffe, arriving in the packet from Boston, and your father insisted that I should bring her back to the mansion in his carriage, for your guest the few days she is here."

"I will be more than happy, Miss Manning, in being your hostess, and you are more than welcome, I assure you, while I owe my father thanks for sending you to cheer me in my loneliness," said Stella in her sweet way, which caused Nellie Manning to feel at home at once, and she explained that she and her brother had lately inherited a fortune from a distant relative, and she had come on to tell him all about it.

The handsome young middy could not tear himself away from the mansion for a couple of hours, but then hastened back to the vessel, leaving the two maidens alone, and fast becoming friends.

That evening Captain Ferncliffe brought the middy and Lieutenant Burr Mabrey home with him to supper, but soon after received a note from the Admiral asking him to come to see him in a distant part of the city, and the four young people were left to themselves.

Thinking that Peyton Manning might wish to talk business about their inheritance, with his sister, Stella invited the lieutenant to a game of chess with her in the library, but this first move in the game the middy checkmated by asking Miss Ferncliffe to sing a favorite ballad of his, and doing it as innocently as though he had not heard her little plan to leave the room.

Of course Stella complied, and the midshipman handed her her guitar, while the lieutenant crossed over and sat down by Nellie Manning, who was certainly a most beautiful and charming girl, a year the senior of her brother.

Several songs did Stella sing in her sweet, simple way, and then the sly middy, not to lose her, asked her to play chess with him.

It was a game which her father had taught her, and she was anxious to practice it as much as possible, so as to be a fair opponent for him, so she complied by going to the library with young Mr. Manning.

Left to themselves, Burr Mabrey proposed a stroll in the grounds, for it was moonlight, and the air was balmy and inviting.

Much pleased with her handsome companion, Nellie Manning could but accept, and soon after the two were strolling along the river walk, now in the shadows of the foliage, now in the moonlight.

"What a lovely girl Miss Ferncliffe is, Lieutenant Mabrey," said the maiden as they walked along.

"She is indeed a charming young lady, Miss Manning."

"She is so different from what I expected to find her, knowing her strange history, for she is refined to elegance though scarcely eighteen, I should think, and she knows, it seems, much of the world, the little while she has mingled in society."

"She has read much and I believe, though humble fisher-people now, those who reared her had seen better days by far, and had devoted much time to her education."

"How fortunate that she did not fall in love with and marry some fisher-lad, for he could never have been elevated to what she is."

"And yet there is one down in the little hamlet where she passed her girlhood, Miss Manning, who is as elegant in manner as she is, and one of the bravest fellows I ever met, while he is as handsome as an Apollo, and a perfect seaman."

"You certainly are his warm admirer, lieutenant; but is he a lover that may some day turn up for the hand of Miss Ferncliffe?"

"Ah! that no one can tell; but he would be a dangerous rival to any man."

"My poor brother is desperately in love with her, I see; but then a few sighs, a few tears, a heart throb at losing her, and Peyton is of that age to seek consolation with another fair one."

"But he is a noble boy, lieutenant, and will make a fine man, I hope."

"There is no doubt of it, Miss Manning, especially when he has a sister like yourself to guide him."

"You flatter me, sir."

"Oh, no; for Peyton has told me much of you; and, do you know, that I think you strangely like Miss Ferncliffe?"

"Indeed! she told me to-day that she thought we were alike, as we stood before the parlor mirror together putting flowers in our hair."

"We are certainly about the same size, and I esteem it a compliment to have a face like hers."

"Yet you have, and had I met you driving alone, I would have bowed to you for Miss Ferncliffe; but come, let us retrace our way, for the path becomes gloomy now in this dense foliage."

They turned about, but had taken only a few steps when several forms stole quickly up behind them, a dull thud was heard and Burr Mabrey fell upon his face his full length, while strong arms seized Nellie Manning, a rude hand was thrust over her mouth, and she was borne rapidly away.

"Bring that man!" said a deep voice, and the form of the lieutenant was raised by powerful arms and carried rapidly along the dark pathway after those who bore the maiden, who had fainted.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE YACHT STARTS ON A CRUISE.

Two games of chess were played by Stella and the midddy, and then, as they had taken some time, and the lieutenant and Miss Manning did not join them, the maiden suggested that they should look them up.

The parlor was vacant, and a glance into the conservatory showed that they were not there.

Then the midddy and Stella expected they would certainly find them upon the piazza, but in this they were also disappointed.

"Where can they be?" asked Stella.

"I will tell you, they are out walking, for I know Sis cannot resist water scenery by moonlight."

"Shall we look them up?" said the midddy.

"Oh, yes, for it is getting late," and somehow a dread of evil clutched at the heart of Stella.

Taking the arm of the midddy they strolled out into the grounds.

But a visit to the different arbors and along the paths showed no trace of the missing ones.

"Let us return to the house, for they may be laughing at us there, while we are searching for them," said Stella.

So back to the house they went, but Gibson, the butler, could give no account of the lieutenant and Miss Manning.

It was now eleven o'clock, and just then the carriage rolled up to the door with Captain Ferncliffe.

Instantly he was made acquainted with the state of affairs, and the servants were called and ordered to thoroughly search the grounds.

But the search was fruitless, and now, thoroughly alarmed, Captain Ferncliffe ordered the boatswain of the yacht to be sent for.

"If it was you and Stella that were missing, Peyton, I could believe you were playing some prank; but not so with Lieutenant Mabrey and your sister."

"No, sir, Sis is full of fun, but she would not treat her host and hostess in such an unladylike manner, while it is not at all like Lieutenant Mabrey," answered the midddy.

Just then the boatswain of the yacht arrived, having hastily sprung from his bunk at the summons of his captain.

"Boatswain, have you noticed any strangers about the grounds this evening?"

"No, sir."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have seen no one?"

"No strangers, sir; but I passed Miss Stella and the lieutenant as I went down to the yacht some two hours ago."

"It was Miss Manning and the lieutenant, father, for I have not been out of the house."

"Begging pardon, miss, it looked like you."

"Yes, boatswain, my daughter does not look unlike a lady who is her guest."

"But where were you when you saw them?"

"Going along the river walk, sir."

"In which direction?"

"Toward the Wild Nook, sir, as they call yonder clump of rocks."

"And this was two hours ago?"

"Shortly after eight bells, sir."

"Have you seen any strange craft on the river, to-day?"

"There was a trim-looking smack went up shortly after daylight, sir, and passed down to-night."

"At what time did she go down?"

"About half an hour after I seen the lieutenant and leddy, sir."

"You are sure of this?"

"Yes, sir, I was just turning in when she passed."

"My glass, Gibson."

The spy-glass was handed to Captain Ferncliffe, who leveled it down the river toward the harbor.

For full a minute he kept it to his eye, and then said, hastily:

"Boatswain, the craft you speak of is just passing through the Narrows."

"Yes, sir."

"Quick! get on board and get all ready to sail, and you, Manning, jump into my carriage and drive to the Spiteful."

"Yes, Captain Ferncliffe."

"Tell Lieutenant Rupert that I wish twenty seamen, and Lieutenant Field with ten marines."

"I want all armed thoroughly, and to come with plenty of of ammunition—and stay!"

"Yes, sir," and the midddy paused on the steps.

"Tell Rupert to send in the launch the two boat-howitzers, and you meet me off the battery with them, for I shall sail in the yacht as soon as I can get off."

Fortunately the coachman had not been dismissed, and the midddy, springing into the carriage was driven away at the top-speed of the horses.

The Spiteful was nearing completion, but she was not yet in sailing trim, though her guns and crew were on board.

Hailing her, the midddy soon had a boat sent for him, and half an hour after the launch and first cutter left the side of the saucy-looking cruiser, and pulled rapidly down the East river.

The yacht was just rounding the Battery, and laying-to, the boats ran alongside, and began to quickly discharge their freight.

"He has good three hours' start, if not more, but I think we can sight him once we get clear of the Narrows or the Hook."

"If not, Manning, we will follow him to his den," said Captain Ferncliffe, grimly.

"Do you know where that is, sir?" asked the midddy.

"Yes, for the boatswain says it is one of the vessels that was anchored in the fishers' haven, when we were wrecked there."

"Indeed, sir! do you think that they would be guilty of such a wrong?"

"I begin to fear that they are worse than they look, Peyton."

"I hope not, sir."

"I hope not, too; but then this attempted abduction of Stella, and the recognizing as smugglers of the crew that were in the river at the time, with to-night's performance, lead me to believe that these fishermen are perhaps little better than pirates."

"But Miss Ferncliffe would certainly know if such was the case, sir, after her long stay among them."

"I thing not, Peyton, as men engaged in such desperate work would keep it a secret, among themselves."

"At any rate, I shall find out, and with our three guns, ten marines, and twenty-five seamen, I shall make it warm for those fellows if they have run off with your sister and Lieutenant Mabrey."

"Why they should kidnap poor Nellie I cannot see, sir."

"You heard what the boatswain said?"

"What was that, sir?"

"About mistaking Nellie for Stella."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, between your sister and Stella there is certainly a striking resemblance, and my idea is that she has been kidnapped, believing her to be my daughter."

"It may be, sir."

"And they have either killed poor Mabrey, or run off with him, too; but unless he was taken unawares, he was not tamely caught."

"But for what purpose, sir?"

"I am rich, Peyton, and so is Mabrey, and a ransom would be greatly coveted by lawless men."

"I see, sir, and I hope it is no worse; but I will give my share of my inheritance in gold to get poor Nellie back."

"We'll give iron, lead and steel instead of gold, Peyton, to ransom them," was the grim reply of the captain, and he turned to his helmsman and ordered him to get out of the yacht all that he could in the run down the bay.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BROUGHT TO BAY.

HUGH TALBOT was an early riser, and the sun was just above the sea-horizon when he came out of his little cottage home one morning, and glanced upon the waters.

He had heard of the sailing of the Shadow the night before, but it was said that she had gone down toward Barnegat for a fishing voyage, and so he had not gone after her to see what Carter Hayes was up to, for it had been reported to him by his faithful spies that the young skipper had not given up the thought of winning Stella, and he knew that he would prove dangerous in carrying out his intentions against the girl.

"Ah! there comes the Shadow into the harbor now"

"Carter did not stay long, or he caught a big haul in a short time," said Hugh, as his eyes fell upon the little smack gliding up to her anchorage.

"Ah! there comes Captain Ferncliffe's yacht!"

"And she is heading toward the mouth of the river."

"What can she want here?"

The yacht was now visible, heading directly into the river, and Hugh continued:

"She either has a pilot on board, or is risking running in without one."

"If she had fired a gun I would have gone out and brought her in, though I hope she does not mean trouble for us here."

"But she is crowded with men, and I see three guns upon her decks!"

With this the young sailor boldly walked down the hill, following the path toward the shore off which lay the little hamlet fleet.

The Shadow had glided to her anchorage and dropped anchor, just as the yacht entered the river, and was in plain view of the latter vessel, for they were but a mile apart.

Under full sail the yacht held up the river before the wind, following the windings of the channel with remarkable accuracy without a pilot, for she had none; but then the different color of the water here and there marked it out pretty well to the helmsman.

By the time that Hugh Talbot reached the landing the yacht had reached the harbor, and had come to with her guns covering the Shadow while the men on the other vessels looked on in amazement and alarm.

Carter Hayes had sprung into his boat, after dropping anchor and furling sails, but seeing that the yacht evidently was making for his vessel, he put back to her and boarded her, while he stood quietly awaiting her approach.

It may be that a gun trained upon his boat had decided his return, but his putting back was just in time, as Peyton Manning held the fuse ready to fire when he did so.

The hamlet was now fully aroused, and back upon the hillside were visible women and children in a great state of excitement, for it was evident that the yacht's visit was a hostile one, crowded as she was with armed men, and loudly entering the quiet little harbor with a crew at each gun, and the marines with their muskets at a "ready."

Men were also seen hastening down to the shore from the hamlet, and what the result would be no one could tell.

As Hugh reached the shore he sprung into a skiff and rowed out toward the yacht.

As he did so, he heard Captain Ferncliffe's stern, deep voice cry out:

"Ho, that smack!"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Carter Hayes.

"I wish to see your captain. Is he on board?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

Springing into the yacht's yawl Captain Ferncliffe was rowed rapidly on board the smack, where Carter Hayes received him at the gangway, saluting politely, and saying:

"This is an honor, sir, for a naval captain to visit my humble vessel."

Captain Ferncliffe was taken aback by the coolness of the smuggler.

He had chased the smack through the night, and had seen her put into the river.

No boat had left her side, because he and several others with glasses had kept close watch.

He confidently expected to find on board Nellie Manning and Lieutenant Mabrey, and yet withal he was met by the smack's skipper with a polite coolness that amounted to almost effrontery.

What could it mean, he wondered.

"My dear young skipper, you will be more honored by my attentions, if I discover on this vessel two persons whom I seek," replied the captain.

"Indeed, sir, I do not think you will find any deserters from the navy among my crew."

"In fact, I know it."

"I am not searching for deserters, sir; but tell me, where are you just from?"

"New York, sir."

"When did you leave the city?"

"I left the Hudson river about nine o'clock last night, sir."

"When did you go there?"

"I left this river, sir, night before last, and passed up by this city shortly after daylight."

"How far up did you go?"

"To the lumber yards above the city."

"Ah! and your purpose in going there?"

"To get lumber, sir, to build me a new cabin."

Captain Ferncliffe was annoyed, for the young skipper told a straight story.

Had he told a different one, Captain Ferncliffe would have known that he was speaking falsely.

But he had followed the smack a long way, and was not going to yield for fear of wounding the feelings of the young skipper, so he said, bluntly:

"Well, young sir, your vessel was pointed out as one suspected of being engaged in some deviltry, and I have been in chase of you since midnight, so you will excuse me if I have your craft searched."

"It is a small vessel, sir; so you can easily find smuggled goods if there are any on board."

"I am not looking now, sir, for smuggled goods."

"Indeed, sir?" and Carter Hayes looked surprised.

"I am looking for stolen goods, sir."

"I am no thief, sir, nor am I a smuggler."

"I am but a poor fisherman, and you, with your men and guns at your back, have, of course, the power to insult me."

Carter Hayes spoke warmly, and with the air of just indignation.

But Captain Ferncliffe answered:

"My dear sir, in these times I make no apology for my actions.

"The goods I speak of as having been stolen, are, to tell the truth, an officer of the navy, and a lady, who, I have every reason to believe, were kidnapped from my grounds last night."

"Indeed, sir; what would I desire, kindly tell me, with a naval officer and a lady?"

"Gold for their ransom, of course," was the blunt reply.

"Again you insult me, sir."

"Take it as you please; but your vessel was near at the time. She has a suspicious look; your fishing fraternity along this coast do not bear the best name just now, and hence I gave chase to you."

"And your chase is a fruitless one."

"I am not yet convinced of that, though you appear honest."

"I am honest, sir."

"That remains to be proven."

"You are at liberty to search my vessel."

"I shall do so, and if I find on board those I seek, I will swing you up to the peak of my yacht with but five minutes for repentance."

"If I do not find them, I will regret that I troubled you and depart, expecting at some future time to catch you in deviltry, for, in spite of your assertion of honesty, you have a look that gives your words the lie, and sets you down in my mind as a rascal."

"What, again?" hissed Carter Hayes.

"Yes, again."

"Oh! but you should rue your words! Ay, and eat them, did we stand upon equal terms."

"My dear sir, my yacht is alone in a fleet of thirty vessels."

"I have not two-score men, all told, at my back, and I see on these vessels alone that number, and fully half a hundred more upon the shore, so we are certainly not on equal terms, as your side is the stronger."

"But I wish no quarrel with you, for I owe it to the good people in yonder hamlet that my daughter lives to-day, and that my wife received kindly burial."

"I have paid the pecuniary debt I owed those who cared for her; but the debt of kindness I can never repay, and I tell you that I have held off from attacking yonder hamlet on my child's account, though rumors are brought to me daily that you people are the Buccaneers of Barnegat, smugglers and wreckers."

"I have tried not to believe it, and so I shall continue as long as I can; but I warn you, if you are the wolves in sheep's clothing that men call you, a fearful day of reckoning will come for you all."

"Now, sir, I shall search your vessel, and not finding those whom I seek, I shall depart."

"Finding them, you know your fate."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE FRUITLESS SEARCH.

WHEN Captain Ferncliffe said to Carter Hayes what he did, that he would depart if he did not find Lieutenant Mabrey and Nellie Manning on board the smack, but hang him, the young skipper, if he did, he looked straight into the face of the one he addressed.

But Carter Hayes met his gaze unflinchingly, and even smiled at his threat.

"Boatswain, search this craft thoroughly!"

The order was given by Captain Ferncliffe to his boatswain, who promptly saluted and began his work, aided by two of the boat's crew who had rowed the officer on board.

Even cracks were peered into by the boatswain, who would have given a month's pay to have found those for whom he was searching; but all to no avail.

"They are not on board, sir," reported the seaman.

"You have made your search thorough, boatswain?"

"Yes, sir."

"There are no secret closets that you could find, where they might be confined, bound and gagged?"

"No, sir."

"Do fishing-smacks have such luxuries as secret closets on board?" asked Carter Hayes, with a sneer.

"Smuggling smacks do, sir," was the quick retort, and, hardly satisfied with the work of his men, Captain Ferncliffe went over the vessel himself.

He found all shipshape on board, and as trim and neat as a pleasure craft; but nowhere could he discover a secret receptacle large enough to hide a man in.

"The fact is, I have taken thousands of dollars' worth of smuggled goods out of a secret trap, on vessels no larger than this," said Captain Ferncliffe, as he came on deck.

"I wish I could find as much on my vessel, sir," answered Carter Hayes, and then he continued:

"I hope you are satisfied, sir, that I am not the abductor of your friends?"

"I am compelled to be, sir."

"Good-day," and Captain Ferncliffe turned to his boat.

Entering it, he was rowed back to the yacht, a look of disappointment upon his face.

"Well, sir?" eagerly said Peyton Manning, as his commander touched the deck.

"It seems that we ran the wrong wolf to his den, Peyton."

"Then that is not the vessel?"

"Yes, it is the vessel that passed my house, but the fellow gives a good account of himself, so I can do nothing."

"But return to New York, sir."

"I see now that this is all that we can do."

"Shall I give orders to get the anchor up, sir?" asked the middy, most anxious to get away.

"Yes; but is not that young Talbot coming toward us in that boat?"

"Yes, sir."

The next instant the boat referred to came near, and Hugh Talbot called out:

"Do you intend to stand out now, Captain Ferncliffe, if I may be so bold as to inquire?"

"Yes, Talbot."

"You will need a pilot, sir."

"No, I ran in without a pilot, and I can go out without one."

"Pardon me, Captain Ferncliffe, but there is a difference now."

"What is it?"

"The tide is at an ebb now, the wind is blowing stronger, and you cannot, in this rough water, follow the channel, while you have to tack out, when you ran in before the wind."

"By Neptune, but you are right, Talbot."

"I came, sir, to offer to pilot you out."

"I am already indebted to you for favors which you will not allow me to repay, Talbot."

"This is but a slight debt, sir, which any fisher-boy could render you."

"Will you accept pay for your services as pilot?"

"I will not, sir."

"Then I'll see you drowned before you shall touch this tiller."

"I beg you will not attempt to go out, sir, without a pilot."

"Then send me a man who will accept gold for his services," somewhat hotly said Captain Ferncliffe.

Hugh Talbot was silent an instant, and then he said:

"I will bring a man out to you, sir."

With this he rowed rapidly shoreward, and watching him, Captain Ferncliffe saw a group of men gather quickly about him.

At length he came down to his boat, accompanied by a young man who sprung in with him.

Straight out to the yacht he rowed, and the young man stepped on board, while Hugh Talbot said:

"You can trust that man, Captain Ferncliffe."

"I thank you, Talbot."

"Now, lads, let us get out of this, for I believe there is a storm brewing, and this is not a place I like in a blow on shore."

The men sprung nimbly to their work, the anchor quickly left the bottom, the sails were spread, filled, and away went the yacht on her starboard tack, the young fisherman at the helm.

"See the skiff, sir!" called out Midshipman Manning, at the same time pointing down the river to where Hugh Talbot's little boat was bounding seaward.

"Where is he going, I wonder?" asked the captain.

"He is going to fetch me back, sir," answered the young fisherman.

"Ah, yes, my man; but do you not want a berth on a cruiser, for I see you know your duty well?"

"No, thank you, sir, for I like it here."

"I'll give you the berth of coxswain of my gig," said the captain, struck with the fine, daring face of the young fisherman.

"I am mate of the smack, sir, which you chased in."

"Indeed! then your captain spoke the truth, did he?"

"Yes, sir, we had been up to New York and back."

"And you had done no kidnapping, my man, eh?"

"I think the search of the smack proved that, sir."

"Well, I cannot get it out of my head that your skipper knew more than he would admit this morning, and if you care to tell aught you may know, I will give you a handsome sum of money."

"I would not care for your gold, sir, if I had aught that I could tell you," was the reply.

With great skill the young pilot handled the yacht, and soon had her riding on the waves that rolled in from the ocean.

Then Hugh Talbot ran his light surf-skiff close up under the stern, and Captain Ferncliffe said:

"Here, my man, you have earned a good fee, and, remember, if you want a good berth, come to me in New York, and I'll pay you a gold eagle for every man you bring with you."

"Thank you, sir, but you are too generous," said the pilot, glancing at the well-filled purse which Captain Ferncliffe had thrust into his hand.

"Keep it, for you have earned it."

The pilot saluted, and then sprung nimbly into the skiff which Hugh Talbot kept close under the yacht's stern.

"Good-by, Talbot, and remember a commission awaits you when you will take it."

"Thank you, Captain Ferncliffe," was the only reply Hugh Talbot made, and then he put back for the mouth of the river, while the yacht held on rapidly along the coast on her way to New York, both Captain Ferncliffe and Peyton Manning very blue at their want of success in finding the lost ones.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HAWK, THE PILOT.

"WELL, Hawk, you were well paid, I see," said Hugh Talbot, as he glanced at the well-filled purse which the young pilot held in his hand as he sat in the stern of the skiff.

"Yes, Hugh, and I owe it to you."

"Nonsense, Hawk, for I could have picked out any other man in the party, and a score wished the work."

"Some thought it best to let the yacht go ashore."

"Yes, the fools did not seem to understand that it was best to get rid of the yacht at once by running her out."

"Why did you not go, Hugh, and pilot the yacht to sea?"

"Because Captain Ferncliffe wished to pay me, and I did not care for his gold."

"Yet I have taken it."

"True, but he is nothing to you, or you to him."

"Well, he has paid me generously, for there are a score of golden eagles in this purse, and it hurts my conscience to take it."

"Why, Hawk?"

"Because last night I was one who served him a shabby trick."

"Why, Hawk! what do you mean?"

"I was with the Shadow last night, as I intended to report to you, Hugh."

"And was she not in Barnegat?"

"No."

"Do you mean it?"

"I do."

"Where was she?"

"Up at New York."

"What?"

"True, we left the Hudson at nine o'clock last night."

"Hawk, you amaze me, for I thought the Shadow was in Barnegat, fishing."

"We have not cast a hook or set a line, Hugh."

"And she went straight to the city when she left here night before last?"

"She headed toward Barnegat, but then stood seaward, put about and made for New York."

"I was thrown off the scent, then?"

"Yes, if you thought she went to Barnegat."

"I did think so; but what did Carter Hayes go to New York for?"

"Mischief."

"Of course, and that accounts for his having been chased by the yacht?"

"Yes, Hugh."

"Hawk, tell me what Hayes was up to."

"Well, we sailed up the Hudson above Captain Ferncliffe's house, and dropped anchor just below the lumber-yards."

"For what purpose?"

"I will tell you, Hugh."

Carter then went ashore and was gone some time, and his face was as black as a thunder-cloud when he came back."

"Did he go to the Ferncliffe mansion?"

"I guess he did, and heard there what he did not like, to judge from his looks."

"Well, Hawk, what else?"

"He came on board mad as a hornet, as I said, and there remained for several hours, when he took the boat and went off alone down the river."

"That was just before sunset; but before it was really dark he came back and gave orders to take the anchor up and let the smack drift."

"He hitched a line to his boat and just kept the smack steady, keeping close inshore until we came to the upper end of the Ferncliffe grounds."

"Then he told us to set sail, and we lowered the anchor, when he rowed away."

"How long was he gone?"

"Not ten minutes, and he came back in a hurry, I can tell you."

"Where had he been?"

"Not far, but far enough to see somebody that pleased him."

"Stella?" and Hugh Talbot's face was growing white and stern.

"Yes, and some one else."

"Who else?"

"A young officer."

"Who was he?"

"That fine young lieutenant that was on the Crocodile, and whom the boys took to so."

"Burr Mabrey?"

"Yes, that was his name."
 "Go on, Hawk."
 "Well, Carter came back and ordered four of us ashore with him, and we obeyed."
 "He placed us in a walk overhung with foliage, while he went off alone."
 "Soon he came back, and we saw two others approaching."
 "One was Stella, and the lieutenant was the other."
 "By Heaven, Hawk, but this story grows interesting, but do not let me interrupt it."
 "Then Carter whispered to us that three of us had to spring upon the officer, while he and myself should capture the lady."
 "Stella?"
 "Yes, but she did look so much the fine lady, as she came toward us, that I hardly knew her."
 "I told him that I would not aid him to take Stella prisoner, but I would help capture the officer, so he told one of the others to help him, while I was to capture the lieutenant."
 "And you did so?"
 "Yes, we waited until they got into the shadow of the arching trees, and then they turned back and we crept upon them."
 "But Carter Hayes, before he seized Stella, struck the lieutenant a heavy blow upon the back of the head that knocked him down, and then the work was done in an instant."
 "Stella was seized?"
 "Yes, a coat was thrown over her head, and she and the lieutenant were taken to the boat and rowed out to the smack, which at once got under way."
 "By Heaven, Hawk, but this was a bold move on the part of Carter Hayes, and I shall make him suffer for it."
 "But then the smack was seen and pursued?"
 "She was pursued, as you know, by the yacht; but we ran in off the highlands and Carter Hayes sent the large skiff with Brant and Si ashore with the two prisoners."
 "Ah! where did he send them?"
 "You know the creek up the North Shrewsbury where you hid the old smack?"
 "Yes."
 "There is a cave there?"
 "Yes, and it is a most secure retreat."
 "He sent the boat there, and told Brant and Si to wait for him there, and he put provisions in the boat for them."
 "But was Lieutenant Mabrey much hurt?"
 "No, for he soon recovered, after getting in the cabin, and then Carter had Brant gag and tie him and Stella too."
 "But what does he intend to do with them?"
 "He intends to leave to-night in his smack and run up there."
 "Well?"
 "Then he intends to make the lieutenant buy himself free, while he will send over to Amboy and get a parson to make Stella his wife."
 "This shall never be, Hawk."
 "So say I, Hugh; but such is his intention."
 "All right, I'll thwart him with your aid."
 "I'll help you, Hugh, for you have always been a true friend of mine," was the reply of Hawk, the pilot, as the skiff ran up on the beach and the two friends sprung ashore, where they were met by Carter Hayes, who quickly called his mate aside.
 "How came Talbot to pick you out to run that yacht to sea?" he asked, in a suspicious tone. "Why did he not pilot her himself?"
 "I don't know; but I kinder think it was from sentiment."
 "Sentiment?"
 "Yes, cap'n."
 "What mean you?"
 "I don't think he wanted to take money from the father of the girl he hopes to marry."
 "Bah! he shall never marry Stella."
 "But he don't know that."
 "You did not hint to him what I did last night?"
 "Do you take me for a fool?"
 "No."
 "Look at poor Caspar Knowles and his crew for doing a little thing of the kind, and don't think I wish to be fool enough to place myself in their position."
 "True, you would place yourself in a worse position, for if I suspected you of treachery, Hawk, I would kill you."
 "Do so, cap'n, when you catch me being a traitor."
 "Ferncliffe paid you well, I suppose?"
 "Do you see this purse?"
 "Yes."
 "He gave me that."
 "There are several hundreds in there," cried Carter Hayes, avariciously.
 "Yes, and they'll stay there, for this purse is my nest-egg," and Hawk walked on toward the hamlet, while Carter Hayes called out:
 "Remember, we sail to-night after bedtime."
 "Ay, ay, captain, I'll be on board," was the answer aloud, while to himself Hawk muttered:
 "Look out that you don't sail on your last cruise, my gallant captain."

CHAPTER XL.

A PAIR OF PLOTTERS.

THE afternoon of the same day of the yacht's visit to the smuggler's harbor, two men sat upon the hill overlooking the hamlet and the sea.

They were just in the shadow of a clump of trees, and not far from the white cross where rested the body of Mrs. Ferncliffe.
 One of the men was Carter Hayes. The other was Caspar Knowles.
 "You say you have a plan to suggest to me, Caspar?" asked Carter Hayes.
 "Yes; but it is one that I put myself in your power by telling you, and you must pledge me not to betray me."
 "I will give you the pledge, Caspar, for I have felt sorry for you of late."
 "Well, I have a plan by which we can make our fortunes."
 "I am with you, Caspar, so out with it."
 "You know that war is threatening with England?"
 "Yes; I know that it looks as though we would have a war."
 "It is certain, and we can take advantage of it to benefit ourselves."
 "How?"
 "Are you afraid to risk your neck?"
 "My neck?"
 "Yes."
 "How?"
 "By putting a rope around it."
 "Ah! by turning pirate?"
 "Yes."
 "I had not thought of that."
 "But I have."
 "What is your plan, Caspar, for I know that you have formed one."
 "There are several fleet schooners being built in New York now for privateers."
 "So I have heard."
 "I know of one that will be ready in a few weeks, with arms and all on board with a crew."
 "The Spiteful, which Captain Ferncliffe is building?"
 "No; for we could not cut her out, as her crew are already on board; but there is another that a merchant captain is fitting out at his own expense and wishes a crew for."
 "Can we get her?"
 "Of course."
 "How?"
 "Why, I can go up and see him, for I know him, offer to get him a crew of fishermen if he will make me first luff, and the thing will be done."
 "But where do I come in?"
 "You will be captain, for you are a better seaman than I am, I frankly admit."
 "But the merchant captain?"
 "Oh! we will throw him overboard as soon as we make an offing, and run the craft ourselves."
 "This is a bold scheme, Caspar."
 "It is one that we can carry out."
 "How many men will we want?"
 "Fully seventy."
 "And where can we get them?"
 "Myself and crew are eleven, and you and your crew make twenty-two."
 "Well?"
 "Then I have sounded as many more of the lads here that I can count on, and the balance we must get up in the city."
 "It looks feasible, but I don't like the idea of hoisting the black flag."
 "We won't do it then."
 "What flag will we sail under?"
 "The Stars and Stripes."
 "Commit piracies under that flag?"
 "Of course, for you know we are to be a privateer, and in war-times no one will notice what we are about, and we can grow rich off of merchantmen."
 "Well, Caspar, I am with you; but I sail to-night on a little private business of my own, and when I return we will talk it over, for I shall have a look in the mean time at the vessel you speak of."
 "Do so; and if you wish to find me, I will be in the city, at the Anchor Inn, on Water street."
 "I know it, and will look you up; but when do you leave here?"
 "As soon as I see my way clear to take Hugh Talbot with me," was the fierce rejoinder.
 "Hail you intend to seek revenge upon him, I see?"
 "I do."
 "And so do I, so do not strike him alone, but if you can get him into your power hold him until we sail, and then he goes with us."
 "What! would you take that man along, Carter Hayes?"
 "Yes, for a short voyage."
 "Ah! I see that you would soon get rid of him?"
 "Yes, we will load him with irons and bury him alive in the sea."
 "Ha, ha, ha! now you are my friend, Carter Hayes, for that will be a glorious death for him to die."
 "Yes, and his burial alive shall be the baptism of our vessel in her red work for gold."
 "Now I must go, for I have a sweet work on hand that must be done at once, and which will bring me both gold and revenge."
 Rising, the precious pair of villains descended the hill toward the hamlet, their faces full of devilish joy at the work before them.

But had they seen a face peering at them from the thicket, and known that all they had said had been heard, their hearts would have quivered with dread.

And that one was Hugh Talbot, to end whose life they had formed so diabolical a plot.

As they descended the hill Hugh Talbot arose from his place of concealment in the cedars, and walked rapidly back along the ridge.

After a walk of several hundred paces he came upon Hawk, standing by the side of a horse saddled and bridled, as though for a journey.

"Well, cap'n, they were there?" asked Hawk.

"Yes."

"I thought they would be, for I heard Caspar tell Carter to meet him there."

"I heard them plan a nice little game too, Hawk, thanks to you."

"I am glad you did; but now I suppose you will ride hard to reach the Shrewsbury?"

"Yes, I'll be there, and don't you fail to sail with Carter Hayes to-night."

"I'll go with him. Good-by!"

Hugh Talbot grasped his hand and then sprung lightly into his saddle, dashing off through the timber with the air of one who was as much at home on the back of a horse as upon the deck of a vessel.

"Come, old horse, you have got to travel lively, for I have to reach my vessel, and then get to my rendezvous with Hawk in time, for Carter Hayes shall be thwarted in the fiendish game he is playing against that brave lieutenant and poor Stella."

So saying, Hugh Talbot urged his horse along the obscure road at a long, sweeping gallop.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE SMUGGLER'S MISTAKE.

As Captain Ferncliffe had predicted, when sailing away from the smuggler's haven, it came on to storm late in the afternoon, and the sea looked dark and threatening.

But Carter Hayes had made up his mind to put to sea, and he ordered his crew on board to get up the anchor.

It may be that on account of the black night without, two of the crew felt assured that their young captain would not sail, and so they absented themselves, or they may have dreaded the danger of running out; but, certain it is, they could not be found, and Carter Hayes, not wishing to attract attention to his sailing, was forced to put to sea with but five men on duty.

Hawk, who was noted as a pilot, was at the helm, and, in spite of the darkness and storm, ran out to sea in safety.

"Now haul close, and let her go, Hawk, for we must drop anchor in the retreat on the Shrewsbury before daylight, as I do not wish to be seen running in there," said Carter Hayes.

And on the stanch smack sped through the darkness and the storm until the Sandy Hook light came in sight.

Rounding the Hook with the wind astern, she then went about and headed up the Shrewsbury, for the wind was blowing too heavy to jibe her.

Hawk still held the helm, for he knew the waters of the Shrewsbury well, and in the darkness swept past the Highlands of the Navesink.

Then the helm was put a-starboard, the sail was thrown to port, and the Shadow, dark and silent as her name, sped on up the North Shrewsbury river, keeping close inshore.

At last, just as the dawn was breaking, she glided into the mouth of a small creek and disappeared amid the foliage-clad banks.

"Now, Hawk, we are safe, and you have done well; but there is more for you to do, if you are not too tired?"

"Well, cap'n?"

"As soon as I find if Brant and his prisoners are here, I wish you to take the surf-skiff and any man you please, and row for Amboy."

"I better go alone, cap'n."

"All right, if you wish to; but with the wind as it is, you can run straight across under sail, as soon as you have rounded the Highlands."

"Yes, it won't take very long; but what am I to do there?"

"Find a preacher and bring him back with you."

"A preacher, cap'n?"

"Yes."

"In the name of the saints, what do you want with a dominie?"

"I intend to marry Stella."

"Ah! but she don't love you."

"Who in Satan's name does she love then?" fiercely said the young skipper.

"I may be mistaken, but I thought she was soft on Hugh Talbot."

"Curse him! but she shall marry me, and you must fetch a parson."

"I'll do it if he will come."

"He must come."

"Tell me how I can make him, cap'n, and I'll do it."

"Here, take this purse, and there is double in it what you have in the one Ferncliffe gave you."

"It feels heavy."

"Bribe him with that; tell him it is a mar-

riage he is to perform, and if he comes I'll see that he does his part."

"I'll go at once, cap'n, but I think I'll need gold for this night's work as well as the dominie."

"You shall have it— Oh, Brant, you are here!"

"What about your prisoners?" said Carter Hayes, to a man who just then entered the yacht's cabin.

"They are safe in the cave; but Stella has refused to eat anything and carries on dreadful."

"And the officer?"

"Oh! he's a good one, and is as happy as a lark, for he sings nearly all the time."

"He'll change his tune when he learns the price I want for him."

"I guess so."

"Now, Hawk, get off at once, and mind you, I'll expect you by night with the preacher."

"I'll fetch him if I have to make fast and tow him," said Hawk, as he left the cabin.

Ten minutes after he was in the surf-skiff heading down the Shrewsbury river, while Carter Hayes went on shore and ascended the hill toward a small cavern, before which the other guard of the prisoners was pacing to and fro.

The cavern was an artificial one, but dug long years before, and it was divided by a wall in the center.

Standing in front of it, Carter Hayes looked in and saw a canvas hammock swung across it in the back part.

In the hammock was a human form.

"Stella!"

At the name the form moved, and then a young girl sprang out upon the hard flooring of the cave.

Her face was pale, but her eyes were red with long weeping, while her costume was one wholly out of place in that drear den.

At sight of her Carter Hayes stepped forward; but as she advanced into the light he started back with the cry:

"Great God! girl, who are you?"

"I am Miss Manning, Sir Pirate, and I demand to know why you have torn me from my friends," was the haughty reply.

"How came you here?" gasped the smuggler, in a half-dazed way.

"Do you ask that question, when you had me brought here, for your man there told me you were his captain."

"Si, is this the woman we brought from the city night before last?" and Carter Hayes turned to the seaman guard.

"Yes, cap'n."

"Then I have made a sad mistake, for, though she looks like Stella, it is not her."

"I seen that before, cap'n, but as I didn't know who it was you wanted, I didn't say nothing."

"I have made a mistake, but this girl shall pay for it, and I will yet have Stella Stanford in my power," hissed Carter Hayes as he half turned away in a quandary as to what he should do.

CHAPTER XLII.

A WOLF IN LAMB'S WOOL.

THE day was drawing to a close, and Carter Hayes was pacing his deck, his brow clouded and lips set.

Beneath him, in the cabin were Nellie Manning and Lieutenant Burr Mabrey, the latter strongly ironed, and the face of the beautiful girl was more hopeful, while that of her companion was fearless and indifferent.

They had been brought from the cave during the day, and Carter Hayes had had an interview with them in which he had boldly stated his terms of ransom, to which they had agreed.

"I will go up to the city to-night and carry that preacher with me, so as to have him on hand when I capture Stella."

"By the way, Hawk should have been back with him by this time."

"As for these two captives, which are to pay me so well, I shall carry them to-night to that haunted farm-house back from the river, where we often store our goods, and I shall keep them there until Caspar Knowles is ready to put to sea in the schooner, and I will get their ransom-money and set them free, for I will have nothing to fear from them then."

"By Heaven! but I am in luck, for I'll sail with a pocket full of gold, have a good craft and a brave crew, while Stella shall accompany me as my loving bride, and I'll soon tame her proud spirit."

"But it is getting dark, and still Hawk has not returned."

"But he will be here, soon— Ah! there is his skiff now and I am glad of it, for I am as hungry as a bear."

"Yes, and the dominie is with him!" and Carter Hayes turned to gaze at the little skiff that was gliding slowly into the creek.

It was dark when Hawk leaped on deck, followed by a tall, slender man, in a long-tailed black coat, white cravat, large spectacles, and a mouth that was drawn sideways from the look of pique upon it.

"Cap'n this is Parson Aminadab, or some-

thing like that, for I can't catch the Bible name that belongs to him; but he'll do the marrying—if you pay him well for it," and Hawk whispered the last words in his captain's ear.

"I am glad to meet you, sir, and I will need your services, but not to-night, though I shall give you a liberal sum for all delay."

"Come, sir, I was just going into the cabin to supper, and you will join me, and I will present you to an officer and a young lady, whom I captured from a pirate vessel; but do not speak of the subject to them, I beg you, as their sufferings have unseated their reason, and I have to keep the gentleman in irons."

"I will gladly do as you wish, my dear friend, for, from the very liberal way in which your messenger treated me, I know that you are a good man," said the parson, in a sing-song tone of voice.

Leading the way into the cabin, which was dimly lighted, Carter Hayes and the parson saw seated upon a chair the form of Burr Mabrey, while Nellie Manning half-reclined upon a settee near him.

Upon the table in the center of the cabin was spread a repast, which one of the crew had prepared for the captain and his guests, and turning to the preacher Carter Hayes said:

"Be seated, sir, for our friends will join us."

"Come, lieutenant, come, Miss Manning, and do not let your sorrows drive away your appetite!"

"Carter Hayes, you are my prisoner!"

The words fell like a knell upon the ears of the smuggler, and with a cry he sprang toward the preacher, for he it was who had spoken.

"Betrayed! but I will have your life, Hugh Talbot, for I know that voice," shouted Carter Hayes, as he drew a knife from his breast and rushed upon his foe.

But a pistol-shot rung out in the cabin, and Carter Hayes measured his length upon the floor, just as cries and firing were heard on deck.

Throwing off his disguise Hugh Talbot turned quickly to the amazed lieutenant and frightened girl, and said, calmly:

"Lieutenant Mabrey, that man's death has set you free."

"I was sorry to have to kill him in the presence of a lady; yet I had to fire, or he would have slain me; but tell me, where is Miss Ferncliffe?" and Hugh Talbot gazed from the beautiful, pale face of Nellie Manning to that of the young officer, in surprise.

"My dear Talbot, I am happy to again meet you, and, as before, you serve me well, and especially this lady, Miss Manning, who is my fellow-captive, and who was kidnapped by mistake for Miss Ferncliffe."

"Miss Manning, permit me to present to you our preserver, Captain Hugh Talbot, and a young Sailor of Fortune, who has served Captain Ferncliffe, your brother and myself most faithfully on a former occasion."

Nellie Manning stepped forward and promptly offered her hand, while she said calmly:

"Captain Talbot I have already heard of from Stella Ferncliffe, and I beg to offer him my thanks and my friendship for what he has done for me this night."

"But, sir, do you not fear to come alone to this vessel?"

"I am not alone, lady, for my vessel is alongside, and my crew have killed or taken prisoners the men who served that poor, misguided wretch," and Hugh Talbot pointed to the dead body of Carter Hayes.

Seeing Nellie Manning shudder as she glanced at the dead form, Hugh Talbot said:

"As my vessel is here, Lieutenant Mabrey, I will be glad to take you in her up to the city, for your friends must be most anxious about you."

"Will you come, Miss Manning?" and Hugh Talbot offered his hand with a courtly grace that surprised the maiden as coming from an humble fisher-lad.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SPY'S REPORT.

Two men met in what was the then upper part of New York, but which is now far downtown in the business portion of the city.

They were both seamen, and one of them the reader knows well, for it is none other than Caspar Knowles.

His companion, for the two walked toward the river-bank together, was one of the haven fisherman, and a man of forty, with a sinister face by no means attractive.

"Well, Crouch, this is an unexpected pleasure, meeting you just now," said Caspar Knowles.

"I was lookin' for you, messmate, for I had been to your anchorage in town, and they told me you had a way of cruising about the green fields in this part of the city."

"Well, I am glad you found me; but when did you leave the Ghost?"

"Only last night."

"Where is she?"

"In her Shrewsbury retreat."

"How did you get away?"

"The captain was going to the haven, and I

asked to go, too, and just after starting I played sick and asked him to put me ashore, so that I might run back to the craft."

"He landed me, gave me a drink o' grog, and I hunted the bay shore, stole a fishing-skiff and came on."

"You must have something important to communicate, Crouch?"

"Well, I has, I guess."

"Then out with it."

"Carter Hayes is dead."

"What?"

Caspar Knowles turned upon the man and grasped him with a grip that hurt him.

"It is true he was killed!"

"Who killed him?"

"Cap'n Hugh."

"Hugh Talbot killed him?"

"He did."

"Come, Crouch, don't make me question you like a lawyer, but tell me what has occurred."

"Well, messmate Caspar, it was a week ago, you know."

"Carter had done just what you did."

"And what was that?"

"He went to kidnapping folks."

"Who did he kidnap?"

"Lieutenant Mabrey and, as he thought, the Daughter of Neptune; but he made a mistake; he happened to get a young lady that was visiting at Captain Ferncliffe's, instead of Stella, and he was in such a hurry he didn't know who she was."

"She fainted, and the young officer was wounded by a blow in the back of the head which Carter gave him, and they were hustled into a skiff off the Highlands, and sent to the old retreat with Brant and Si to look after them."

"Ah! that is what brought Captain Ferncliffe in his yacht to the haven?"

"Yes, and not finding 'em on board, he put back for the city; but Carter sailed off that night and ran up to the retreat, sending Hawk for a parson over to Amboy."

"What did he want with a parson?"

"To marry him to Stella, as he believed the gal was."

"Curse him, that was his little game, was it."

"Yes, I guess his mother does the only weeping for him; but Hawk played double on him, and who do you think was the parson he fetched along?"

"Who?"

"Hugh Talbot."

"What?"

"Fact, he came where the Ghost was lying and had a long talk with Hugh, and the two went off together in Hawk's skiff, while the craft followed after, and we run right in alongside of the Shadow and had it out in a minute."

"Did Hugh Talbot attack the Shadow?"

"He had already kilt Carter Hayes, and we had our orders to board and capture the Shadder's crew, and we did it, tho' there was two of the boys showed fight and we had to kill 'em too."

"Well, this is a high-handed outrage on the part of that young Sailor of Fortune, as the lads call him, and he will be forced to follow in my steps."

"Don't you believe it, messmate, for the whole thing was smoothed over beautiful."

"How?"

"Why he sent the smack Shadder back to the haven under her crew—"

"Did he dare do this?"

"Oh, yes, for the lads were scared at what they had done, and was willing to beg off on any terms."

"Hawk took the craft, and his story and that for the lads that had been with Carter was all made up."

"And what story was this?"

"Cap'n Hugh told 'em to tell that Carter, and the other two lads that was killed, had been lost overboard in the storm, for it was blowing wild the night the Shadder left the haven."

"I know that, for I was there; but was this story believed?"

"It was drunk in just like honey, but the old woman Hayes a'most went crazy about her boy."

"Well, what did Hugh Talbot do then?"

"Sailed up to the city as bold as a wolf, and took the luff and the ledly ashore, after which we put back to the retreat and stayed until the next night, when we ran into the haven, and I found you had gone; but I got your letter you left for me, so know'd where to find you; but you left a little sudden, didn't you?"

"Yes, for I had work to do here; but what did the people say of my running off?"

"Must I tell you square, messmate?"

"Yes."

"They said they was glad of it."

"Curse them! Well, they will hear of me again, for I have a scheme on hand that will bring me untold riches, and now that Carter Hayes is dead, I will be the leader, and you, Crouch, who have been such a faithful spy for me, and friend, shall be one of my officers, for I know well what a good sailor you are."

"But tell me, did Hugh Talbot remain long at the haven?"

"Only till the next night, and then we ran out for a cargo that came in a brig from Spain, and

landed it at the old place, after which we put again for the retreat on the Shrewsbury.

"I tried to get away when we were up the river unloading, knowing that you was here in the city; but I could not do it easy, so waited, so now Cap'n Hugh thinks I'm with the Ghost, and the lads on board thinks I'm with Cap'n Hugh."

"You have done well, Crouch; but as I have several other spies at the haven, and Merkle is still on the Ghost, I wish you to remain here, for you can help me."

"I'll do it, messmate; but when do you sail?"

"Within a couple of weeks, and we have some two-score men yet to get; but come now and I will take you to the Anchor where I put up, and then I have a little private work on hand which I must do," and the expression that came over the face of Caspar Knowles as he spoke was fiendish.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE INFORMER.

CAPTAIN FERNCLIFFE sat alone in his elegant library, looking earnestly over some official papers, while from his lips came the slowly uttered words:

"Now that war has begun between the United States and England, I will have a grand field for work, and its close must see me a commodore."

"Well, my beautiful Spiteful is a good craft to lay the foundation of a name with; but I shall at once begin to construct a frigate and present her to the Government, and she will, I know, be placed under my command."

"Well, Gibson, what is it?" and Captain Ferncliffe turned toward his butler, who just then entered the room.

"A sailor to see you, sir."

"Admit him."

A moment after there entered a man in sailor garb, but one whose appearance was striking.

"Well, my man, you wished to see me?" said Captain Ferncliffe, in the frank, pleasant way in which he always addressed a seaman.

"Yes, sir, I called to see you upon a matter of interest to you."

"Well, out with it, my man."

"I believe you are anxious to catch smugglers, when you can, sir?"

"Indeed I am."

"There is one that has given the Government so much trouble that she is now put down as a pirate."

"What one is that?"

"The Ghost of the Sea."

"Ha! what know you of her?"

"Everything, sir."

"Where is she?"

"That is the secret, sir, which I have come to sell to you."

"I see, you consider it valuable?"

"I know that it is, sir, for there is a reward offered for the capture of the Sea Ghost."

"Yes, several thousands of dollars I believe."

"She is worth it, sir, for as a prize she is valuable, being the fleetest craft in these waters."

"Excepting my schooner, which is now ready for sea."

"The Spiteful, sir?"

"Yes."

"She will have to sail like a witch to hang in the wake of the Sea Ghost."

"Well, we shall see; but now let us find out about the Sea Ghost."

"Yes, sir."

"You know where she is?"

"I do, sir. She is in hiding."

"What crew has she?"

"Twenty seamen now, a captain and two mates."

"Does she carry any guns?"

"Two, sir, small pivots fore and aft, brass twelve-pounders, but they are good ones."

"Who is her commander?"

"A man to whom you owe several favors."

"Ah! and who may that be?"

"First, sir, let us come to an understanding as to terms, and my safety."

"Well, state your terms, and I will tell you very quickly what I will do."

"I wish you to pledge me safety for myself, and allow me to go free as soon as I have piloted you to the Sea Ghost's anchorage."

"Well, what else?"

"I must have five thousand dollars in gold for my information."

"Agreed! I will give you a protection paper, and an order on my banker, payable by him upon his receiving word of the capture of the smuggler known as the Ghost of the Sea."

"Is this satisfactory?"

"It is, sir."

"Now, my man, what is your name?"

"Caspar Knowles."

"And where do you hail from?"

"The fishing-hamlet off which you lost your schooner, the Crocodile."

"You are a smuggler?"

"I am, sir, or rather was."

"And the people of that hamlet?"

"Oh, they are all right, though there is a party among them who are smugglers."

"I thought as much; but tell me, is this Sea Ghost fitted out by those people?"

"A few of them, sir."

"And your motive for betraying those few, and turning informer, is to get gold?"

"Partly that, sir."

"And your other motive?"

"Revenge."

"Ah! against whom?"

"The captain of the Sea Ghost."

"Well, you seem in a fair way to get your revenge; but now tell me who this famous smuggler captain is that has eluded our cruisers for several years."

"A mere boy, sir, for he is just coming twenty-one. His great luck has won him the name among us of the Sailor of Fortune; but you know him as Hugh Talbot, the fisher-lad."

Captain Ferncliffe was upon his feet in an instant, and said hoarsely:

"Do you mean this, man?"

"I do, sir."

"Well, prove this, and I will pay you your money. That young man did serve me well and I tried to make something out of him; but he refused all my offers of advancement and reward, and still kept me under obligations to him."

"Why, it is only a few nights since that he rendered me another great service, and then departed, the same mystery that I had before found him; but I have an idea that— But never mind, for what I would have said does not interest you; but I am anxious now to catch this young fisherman, as he calls himself, and he will give me no more trouble after that."

"Now when do you wish to start in search of him?"

"We must leave to-night, sir, so as to get near the retreat by dawn, as I do not know the water well enough to run in by night."

"But will he not see our approach, for I will go in my new vessel?"

"No, sir, as he lies in an inlet, and we can sail right upon him before he sees us, while we can land a party beforehand to move upon him in the rear and prevent escape in that direction."

"All right, my man, I will be on board my vessel by sunset, so come to me there."

"I will be there, sir, without fail," and Caspar Knowles left the mansion, his face gleaming with malignant triumph at his plot of revenge upon Hugh Talbot.

CHAPTER XLV.

OUTWITTING A TRAITOR.

"It is wrong to listen, I know; but that man means mischief, and I will hear what he has to say."

The speaker was Stella, the lovely child of Neptune, and she stood in the folds of a large curtain, that hung between the library and an adjoining room in her own house.

She had seen Caspar Knowles approaching the mansion, and hearing his request to see her father, she had glided out of the parlor, and noiselessly taken up her position behind the curtain and where she could hear all that passed in the library.

And all she did hear, while her face became white, and her lips firm-set.

As soon as the man had departed she glided back to the parlor, and said to Nellie Manning, who was seated there:

"Come, Nellie, for I wish to see you particularly."

"We will get our hats and go to the arbor on the river."

"Why, Stella, you are as white as a ghost; what ails you?"

"Come, and I will tell you," she said, hoarsely, and the two went out into the grounds and were soon seated in the little arbor where Stella had had her interview with Carter Hayes.

"Now, Stella, what is it, child?" said Nellie Manning, whom the captain and Stella had urged to make her home with them, for she was an orphan and her brother was her nearest kindred tie.

"Nellie, I have just played eavesdropper, and heard a plot to ruin Hugh, and perhaps cost him his life."

"Indeed! what was that?"

"One of my old lovers at the haven, but a man I hate, came here to see my father, and he is to betray Hugh, his vessel and crew into my father's hands."

"Now father is angry because Hugh will not allow him to repay him the services he has rendered him, and, as he believes I like him, he is anxious to catch him in some mischief, so as to degrade him in my eyes, for he does not know that I am aware of the life poor Hugh leads."

"They have set to-night to go down to the retreat and capture the Ghost, and I am determined that it shall not be."

"But how can you prevent it, Stella?"

"I will tell you how, Nellie. I will disguise myself as a boy, take my surf-skiff, which sails like the wind, and run down to the retreat."

"I can get there ahead of the Spiteful, save Hugh, and return here by to-morrow noon at furthest."

"Do you mean to go alone?"

"By all means."

"You must not, for I will go with you."

"You, Nellie?"

"Yes, for I have perfect confidence in your skill as a sailor, and I will go as a boy too, so that we will be two boys on a frolic."

"Bless you, dear Nellie; now I will let father believe that we are going up to his farm in Westchester to remain a day or two, and I will stop at the Bloomingdale Tavern, send for a Jew who I know receives the smuggled goods, and make him provide us with suits."

"Then we will row down here, take my skiff as soon as it is dark, and head for the retreat of Hugh."

"A good plan, Stella, and may success attend it," said Nellie Manning, who was really delighted at the prospect of the adventure.

But her maidenly dignity caused her to say:

"I suppose it would be best if we told Lieutenant Mabrey, and asked him to warn Captain Talbot."

"Not for the world, for, though he is sworn to secrecy about Hugh, he would not do one act to aid his escape from my father, for it would not be honorable in him."

"True; I did not look at it in that light, so I am ready when you are, Stella."

CHAPTER XLVI.

WARNED.

It was some time after midnight, yet still the young skipper of the Sea Ghost had not retired.

He sat alone in his cosy little cabin, looking over some old letters that lay upon a table before him.

The pretty smuggling-craft lay in an inlet, with wooded shores upon either side, wholly hiding her from view of any craft passing along the river, and in their retreat her crew always felt perfectly safe.

The crew had turned in for the night, without even a watch on deck, so secure they felt themselves, and Hugh Talbot sat running over his papers.

"Well, my days of slavery to that man are over at last, for the time of my forced oath of faithfulness to him ends to-night."

"They believe me at the haven to be the son of old Talbot and his wife, but they little know that I am their slave."

"True, he took me from that sinking wreck and raised me as his child; but he led me to believe that my father had committed some great crime, and was flying for his life when overtaken by wreck and death, and under threats that I would be killed by those who wished to have me out of the way, he made me swear to serve him until I was twenty-two years of age, when he would tell me all."

"But I saw that he intended to still deceive me, and so I took the box from its hiding-place, and here are the papers it contains."

"First, my father was guilty of no crime, but was going to his estates in the Carolinas when wrecked."

"Second, I find here a will left by a distant relative of my father's, in which a large fortune is left to be divided between three of us after so many years."

"Those three are my sister, my brother, and myself, and should any one of us die, the other two receive that share also."

"The time set was up some two months ago, and I suppose my sister and brother have their share now."

"So be it, for they are honorable, and I am a smuggler."

"This third paper shows that Talbot was himself a fugitive from justice, and hating my father, sought revenge by rearing me and keeping me out of my inheritance, making an outlaw of me, and intending never to give me that which was mine, or tell me the truth as to who I am."

"So be it; I have long suspected him of double-dealing toward me, and I have acted for myself in taking this box, which he found on the wreck, from its hiding-place."

"And oh! what a secret does it tell me!"

"Well, now I have served my time, now my chains of outlawry are broken, I can lead a different life— Ha! that was the dip of an oar!"

Quickly thrusting the papers out of sight, Hugh sprung up the companionway to the deck. All was silent, and darkness reigned supreme. But again came the splash in the water, and he called out sternly:

"Boat, ahoy! answer or I fire into you!"

"Don't fire, Hugh! we are friends!" came the answer.

"Stella's voice among a thousand!" and the young smuggler captain sprang to the side of the vessel, just as a slender form stepped on deck, followed a moment after by another.

"Quick! take us to your cabin, for I have news for you," hastily said Stella.

In amazement he led the way, and, as the light fell upon them he saw what appeared to be two handsome boys.

"Stella! Miss Manning! and in this disguise?"

"Sit down, Hugh, and listen to me, for I came to warn you of danger."

"Noble Stella!"

"I overheard Caspar Knowles tell father that

he would pilot the Spiteful here, and she is now becalmed out in the bay on her way here, for when the wind left me, I took to my oars."

"You are a brave girl, Stella."

"I was not going to allow you to be caught, Hugh, and so Nellie and myself came to warn you."

"The Spiteful was to run in here just as soon as it was light enough for that traitor to see to pilot her in, and you may be certain that she is being towed across the harbor now, for my father is bent upon your capture, as you have angered him in refusing his aid, and more, he fears you will run off with the Daughter of Neptune," and Stella laughed merrily.

"I would like to, Stella; but I am only a poor smuggler and you a rich lady," he said, bitterly.

"Well, if you don't get out of this you'll be hanged as a poor smuggler, so you had better call up your crew and tow out and down the river, and by dawn a wind will spring up."

"You are a born sailor, Stella, and I will take your advice, for I wish not my vessel or my crew captured."

"Here, take a glass of wine, for you both need it, while I set the crew to work."

He left the cabin, and soon after the two maidens felt the vessel moving.

"We have the boats out ahead, Stella, and will strike the bay by dawn, and then you had better leave us, and hug the Highland shore until you can get back to the city, and God bless you both for your noble service to me in my need."

But towing was slow work, and the day dawned with the Sea Ghost still under the Highlands, so that Stella and Nellie determined to depart.

Getting into their skiff, Stella seized the oars and sent the light boat skimming over the waters, while Hugh Talbot stood on deck waving them farewell.

The wind soon after sprung up and carried the skiff from sight around the Highlands.

Then came the boom of a gun, followed quickly by another.

"Great God! Captain Ferncliffe is firing upon his own daughter!" cried Hugh Talbot, and his voice rung for the boats to come in and sail to be set.

Quickly the Sea Ghost was bowling along, and, shooting out into the waters of the bay, all on board saw the little skiff flying along over the waters, while the Spiteful was heading for her under a light breeze, and firing as she gave chase.

"Stand by that bow-gun! send a solid shot over the Spiteful to attract her attention; but mind you, don't hit her!" shouted Hugh Talbot, in a fever of excitement.

"Ay, ay, sir," and the bow-gun sent a shot flying over the decks of the Spiteful.

The effect was magical, for every eye was now turned upon the Sea Ghost, and instantly the Spiteful gave up the chase of the skiff and bore down toward the smuggler.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SAILOR OF FORTUNE.

THE position of the smuggler was now most critical, for, having attracted the fire of the cruiser, he had to stand right across to the point of the Hook, and round it before he could get to sea, with the Spiteful bearing down upon him to cut him off.

As for the skiff, it still held on, but both Stella and Nellie looked anxiously back at the chase.

They had been spied by those on the Spiteful and signaled to come on board.

But that was just what the two girls did not wish to do, and so they determined to run for it.

Then a shot was fired across the skiff's bows, and having no effect, another shot was sent over it.

But the skiff held on, and deeming that she evidently carried some important fugitive, Captain Ferncliffe, giving up, now that it was daylight, all hope of surprising the smuggler, gave chase, to suddenly be called off by the bold act of Hugh Talbot.

"Brave Hugh! he sacrifices himself to save us," cried Stella.

"Yes, he is a noble fellow indeed," answered Nellie Manning.

In the mean time the Sea Ghost held on for the point of the Hook under full sail, and the Spiteful bore down under clouds of canvas, not firing, as captain Ferncliffe believed in the speed of his vessel and did not wish to mar the beautiful smuggler craft.

"She sails like a witch, and there! she rounds the Hook! Now we will have it in open water, Mabrey, and we will see what the Spiteful can do," cried Captain Ferncliffe.

Clouds of duck now floated above the decks of the Spiteful, and she went flying along like a race-horse.

Yet still the Sea Ghost seemed to gain, and the bow-guns were ordered to be turned upon her.

But the shots flew wild, and soon the smuggler was out of range.

She had passed the haven harbor, and was flying on down the coast, when suddenly out of the river glided a large brig-of-war, flying the English flag.

Instantly all was excitement on board the Spiteful, for she saw that her foe was far the heavier in men and metal, and as combats at sea had already occurred between American and British vessels, there was no doubt of a battle now.

But Captain Ferncliffe was no man to fly from a foe, and he began the battle by sending a shot over the Englishman.

A broadside was the answer, and instantly the combat was begun.

Fiercely the guns roared, and nearer and nearer the two vessels drew to each other, giving and receiving hard blows.

Nearer and nearer, until they were but a cable's length apart, sailing side by side and pouring in their desperate fire.

But the heavier metal of the Englishman began to tell upon the Spiteful, and Captain Ferncliffe felt that it was madness to fight longer and half his men shot down, so he was about to give the order to strike the flag when wild cheers greeted his ears, and through the smoke a vessel was seen to sweep down upon the Englishman and board.

Then followed a fierce hand-to-hand fight.

"It is the smuggler!" shouted Lieutenant Mabrey from the rigging.

"Helmsman, lay the Spiteful alongside yonder craft!" ordered Captain Ferncliffe.

The order was obeyed, but when the grapples were thrown the fighting had ceased, the flag of the British vessel had been struck.

"Captain Ferncliffe, allow me to turn over to you your prize," said Hugh Talbot, advancing to meet the commander of the Spiteful.

"Great God! I owe it to you that I saved my vessel, and now you give me the prize that you have taken."

"I saw your foe was too heavy for you, sir, so I signaled the haven for men, and half a dozen boat-loads of brave fellows came at my call, and I carried the Englishman by boarding."

"And again place me under an obligation to you which I cannot repay," said Captain Ferncliffe bitterly.

"Pardon me, sir, but I will relieve the obligation by accepting a commission as a Privateer Captain, if you can get it for me, and the little Sea Ghost shall win me a name, for from this day, sir, I am no longer a smuggler."

"God bless you, Hugh Talbot, it gives me joy to hear those words; but this is your prize, and you have saved the Spiteful, to boot, so you will readily be commissioned."

"Now help me with the wounded and prisoners."

"With pleasure, sir, and there lies a man I am glad to know is dead," and Hugh Talbot pointed to the body of Caspar Knowles, who had fallen on the deck of the Spiteful.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONCLUSION.

CAPTAIN FERNCLIFFE found no difficulty in securing for Hugh Talbot a commission as a privateersman, and the young captain, with his crew of brave fishermen, set sail to war against England.

With the brand of smuggler no longer upon his brow, Hugh felt like a different man, and in fact he was a different man, as he made known to Captain Ferncliffe that his name was not Talbot, but Manning, and his letters proved him to be the brother of Nellie and Peyton, who most gladly welcomed him as their own flesh and blood.

Captain Ferncliffe being promoted, and ordered to a larger vessel, Burr Mabrey became commander of the Spiteful, with Peyton Manning as his lieutenant, and he, too, started upon a cruise.

Some years after the three vessels commanded by Commodore Ferncliffe, and Captain Mabrey and Hugh Manning, happened to drop anchor in New York harbor at the same time, and before they set sail again an interesting affair occurred at the Ferncliffe mansion, which was none other than the marriage of Nellie Manning, to Captain Burr Mabrey, and Stella, the Daughter of Neptune, to Captain Hugh Manning Peyton Manning acting as "best man" to both gentlemen, for he had recovered from his love attack for Stella, and had fallen in love with a Southern heiress.

As for the fishermen of the haven, they won a name during the war as brave sailors and true, and at its close many of them had become rich off of prize-money, and settled down to industrious, honorable lives.

The haven is now known no more, but there are many old men, dwellers along the coast, who point out where the hamlet once stood, and tell over and over again to their grandchildren on winter nights, the story of Neptune's Daughter and The Sailor of Fortune.

THE END.

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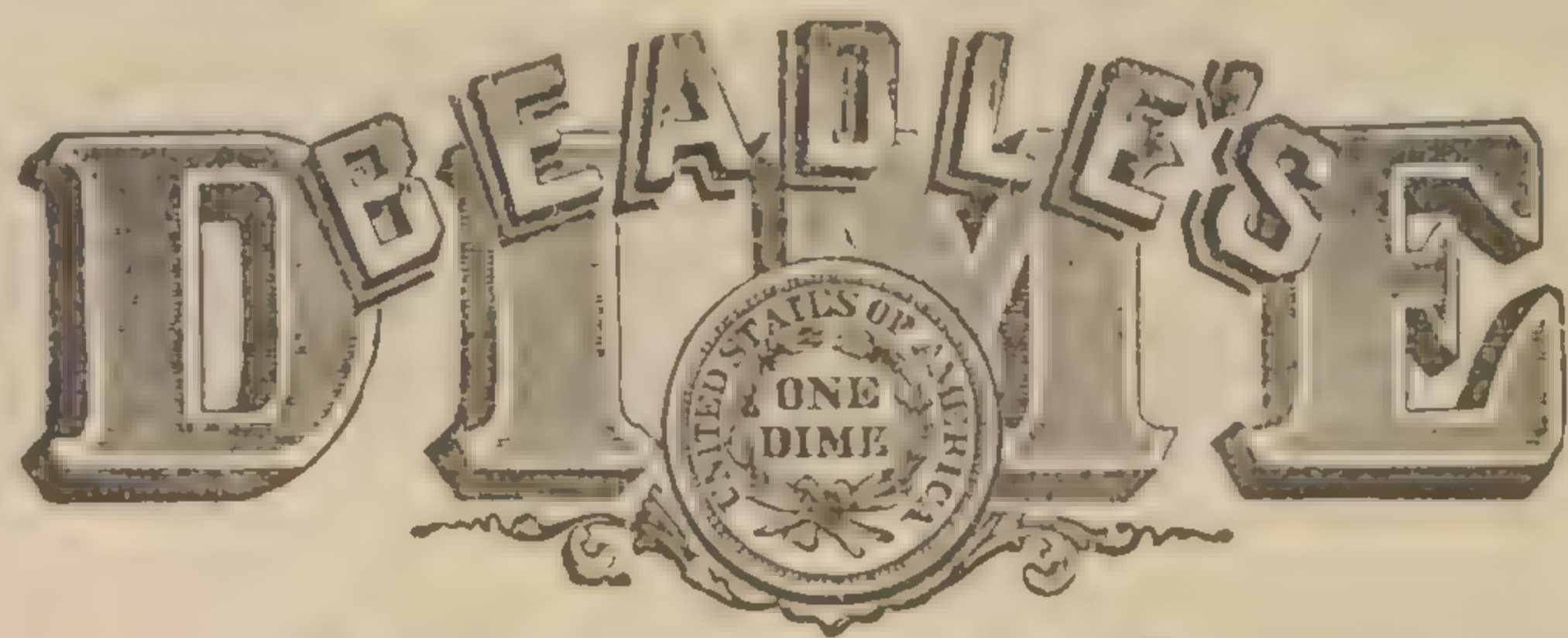
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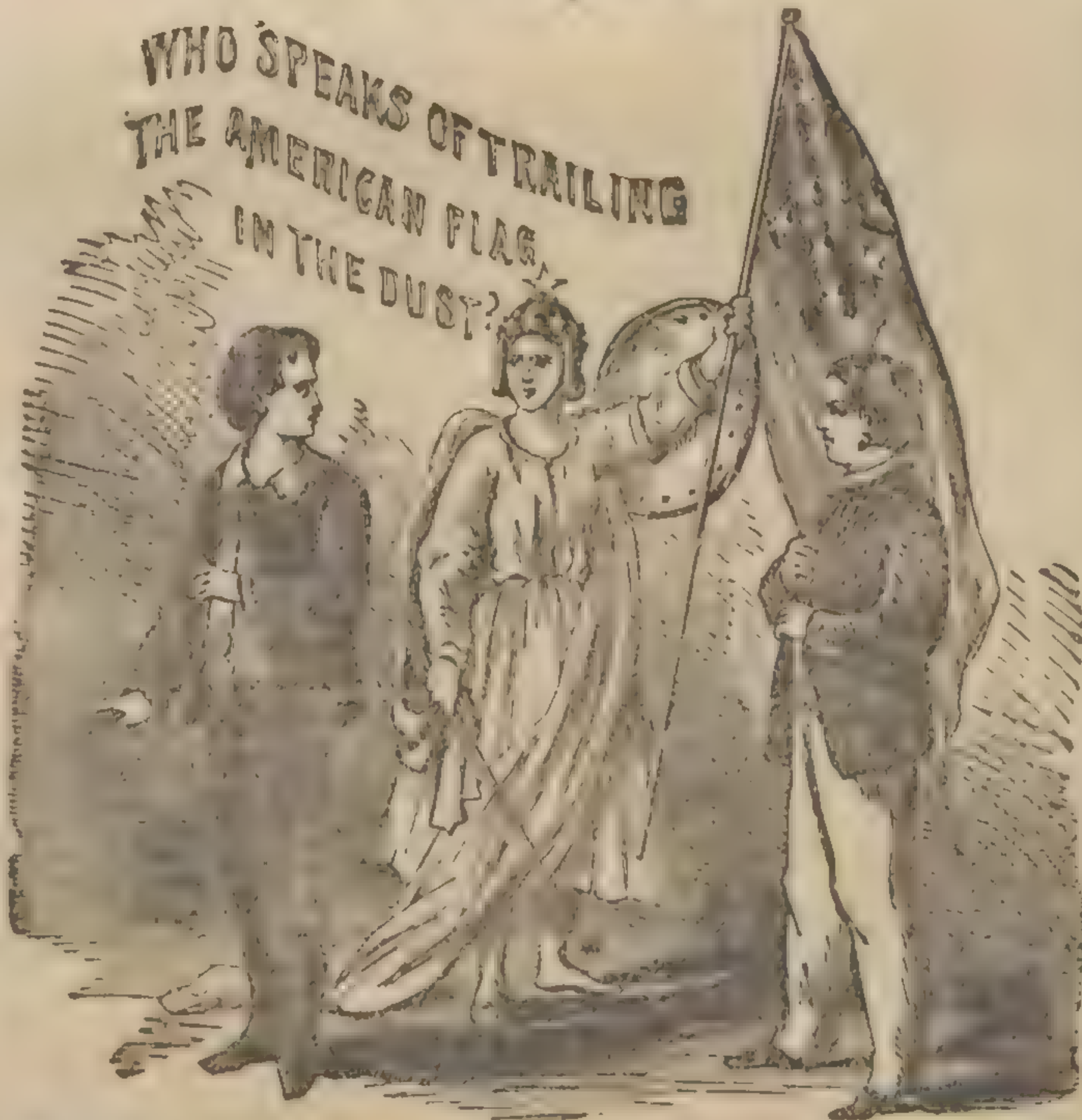
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A Safety Rule. For three ladies.
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The Boasters. A Colloquy. For two little girls.
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The True Heroism. For three little boys.
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Aunt Eunice's Experiment. For several.
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We'll Have to Mortgage the Farm. For one male and two females.
An Old-Fashioned Duet.
The Auction. For numerous characters.

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The Wrong Man. For three males and three females.
Afternoon Calls. For two little girls.
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Mistaken Identity. For two males and three females.
Couldn't Read English. For three males, one female.
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"Sold." For three boys.
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The Credulous Wise-Acre. For two males.

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A Successful Donation Party. For several.
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Evidence enough. For two males.
Worth and Wealth. For four females.
Waterfall. For several.

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Mark Hastings' Return. For four males.
Cinderella. For several children.
Too Much for Aunt Matilda. For three females.
Wit against Wife. For three females and one male.
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The Double Stratagem. For four females.
Counting Chickens Before They Were Hatched. For four males.

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The Dark Cupid. For 3 Gentlemen and 2 ladies.
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Strange Adventures. For two boys.
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Rhoda Hunt's Remedy. For three females, one male.
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Does it Pay? For six males.
Company Manners and Home Impoliteness. For two males, two females and two children.
The Glad Days. For two little boys.
Unfortunate Mr. Brown. For one male, six females.
The Real cost. For two girls.
A Bear Garden. For three males and two females.
The Busy Bees. For four little girls.
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Death Scene. Two principal characters and adjuncts.
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Confound Miller. For three males and two females.
Ignorance vs. Justice. For eleven males.
Pedants All. For four males.

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The Goddess of Liberty. For nine young ladies.
The Three Graces. For three little girls.
The Music Director. For seven males.
A Strange Secret. For three girls.
An Unjust Man. For four males.
The Shop Girl's Victory. For 1 male and 3 females.
The Psychometriser. For 2 gentlemen and 2 ladies.
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Whimsical. A number of characters of both sexes.
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The Six Brave Men. For six boys.
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The True Queen. A colloquy in verse. 2 young girls.
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That Postal Card. For 3 ladies and 1 gentleman.
Mother Goose and Her Household. A whole school fancy dress dialogue and travesty.

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The Friend in Need. For four males.
The Hours. For twelve little girls.
In Doors and Out. For five little boys.
Dingbats. For one female and three males.
The Pound of Flesh. For three boys.
Beware of the Peddlers. For seven mixed characters.
Good Words. For a number of boys.
A Friend. For a number of little girls.
The True Use of Wealth. For a whole school.
Gamester. For numerous characters.
Put Yourself in His Place. For two boys.
Little Wise Heads. For four little girls.
The Regenerators. For five boys.
Crabtree's Wooing. For several characters.
Integrity the Basis of All Success. For two males.
A Crooked Way Made Straight. Gentleman and lady.
How to "Break In" Young Hearts. For two ladies and one gentleman.

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Poor Cousins. For three ladies and two gentlemen.
Mountains and Mole-hills. For six ladies and several spectators.
A Test That Did Not Fail. For six boys.
Two Ways of Seeing Things. For two little girls.
Don't Count Your Chickens Before They Are Hatched. For four ladies and a boy.
All is Fair in Love and War. 3 ladies & 2 gentlemen.
How Uncle Josh Got Rid of the Legacy. For two males, with several transformations.
The Lesson of Mercy. For two very small girls.
Practice What You Preach. For four ladies.
Politician. For numerous characters.
The Canvassing Agent. For 2 males and 2 females.
Grub. For two males.
A Slight Scare. For 3 females and 1 male.
Embodied Sunshine. For three young ladies.
How Jim Peters Died. For two males.

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Patsey O'Dowd's Campaign. 3 males and 1 female.
Hasty Inferences Not Always Just. Numerous boys.
Discontented Annie. For several girls.
A Double Surprise. For four males and one female.
What Was It? For five ladies.
What Will Cure Them. For a lady and two boys.
Independent. For numerous characters.
Each Season the Best. For four boys.
Tried and Found Wanting. For several males.
The Street Girl's Good Angel. 2 ladies & 2 little girls.
A Boy's Plot. For several characters.
"That Ungrateful Little Nigger." For two males.
If I Had the Money. For three little girls.
Appearances Are Deceitful. Several ladies & 1 gent.
Love's Protest. For two little girls.
An Enforced Cure. For several characters.
Those Who Preach and those Who Perform. 3 males.
A Gentle Conquest. For two young girls.

Dime Dialogues, No. 28.

A Test that Told. For six ladies and two gents.
Organizing a Debating Society. For four boys.
The Awakening. For four little girls.
The Rebuke Proper. For three gentlemen and two ladies.
Exorcising an Evil Spirit. For six ladies.
Both Sides of the Fence. For four males.
The Spirits of the Wood. For two troupes of girls.
No Room for the Drone. For three little boys.
Arm-chair. For numerous characters.
Measure for Measure. For four girls.
Saved by a Dream. For two males and two females.
An Infalible Sign. For four boys.
A good Use for money. For six little girls.
An Agreeable Profession. For several characters.

Dime Dialogues, No. 29.

Who Shall Have the Dictionary? For six males and two females.
The Test of Bravery. For four boys and teacher.
Fortune's Wheel. For four males.
The Little Aesthetes. For six little girls.
The Yes and No of Smoke. For three little boys.
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